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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 413. FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 28TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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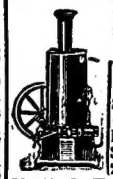

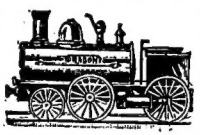

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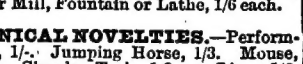

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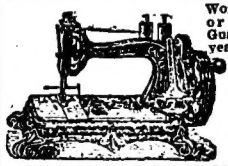

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Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

No. 413.] For the Week ending November 28th, 1896. [One Penny.

Mrs. Colonel Thornhill's Escape.

The Hon. Tom Dunscombe, attaché of the Vienna Embassy in England, on sick leave, slumbered peacefully in the library at Sufton Court. Presently he awoke, shivered slightly, and, as his eye fell on a huge pile of MS. plays at his side, groaned audibly. "They must weigh quite two hundredweight," he murmured. "Critics, I fancy, must be a fortunate race; they only have to see such plays as are performed; they should have the readings of all those which are not. Think of reading all that. Still, the only way to stop this confounded Frenchman's game will be to change the play. To put a spoke in his wheel I'd wade through the lot, so here goes."

Animated with this resolution, the Hon. Tom resumed his reading, and after a good deal of "Pish!" "Bah!" "What rot!" "Pooh!" "Very likely!" "Idiot!" selected a four-act drama.

To judge from the rueful looks he cast on the MS. Tom was not pleased with his choice. "I am no expert on plays," he thought, "but if the critics don't give this beans may I never be promoted.

"However, it will suit the condition of things here, and as I am stage manager, they'll have to play it whether they like it or not." He then made out the cast, rang the bell, sent the parts downstairs, and crept upstairs to bed.

The Hon. Tom Dunscombe was generally subject at the fall of the year to a complication of disorders, which yielded only to special and peculiar treatment—a month in England, with some good shooting. The latter he generally obtained at Sufton Court, the seat of Colonel Thornhill, whose regiment was stationed in India, but as he regarded Tom more as a son than a friend, having been his guardian, the young diplomatist got to look upon Sufton Court as his home.

He had been delighted to find the house full. There was Mrs. Thornhill, the Colonel's young wife, who was in England on a flying visit to her sister, Lady O'Hara, and Sir Patrick her husband. The Damers, the Elibank girls, the young Finchs, and the Vicomte D'Artenare, a man of polished manners, unknown antecedents, seemingly rich, but with that undefinable something clinging about him which bespeaks the adventurer. Tom took a dislike to the Vicomte from the first. "Wherever did Mrs. Thornhill pick him up?" he thought, "and how is it they are so thick, and why is it he can't sing unless she accompanies him?"

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Tom knew all about the Colonel's marriage. How he had met Mabel Desmond eighteen months before, a fashionable beauty then in the zenith of her popularity, and how her parents had badgered her into accepting a man old enough to be her father, but the largest landowner in Downshire.

After the marriage the Colonel, accompanied by his wife, returned to India, and here she was in England again on a visit, which he presently discovered had already lasted over three months. One morning Mrs. Thornhill informed Tom that an actress she had met in India, and who had since blossomed into the manageress of a West-end theatre, had prevailed on her to give a performance at her theatre for the benefit of the East-end seamstresses then on strike.

The manageress proposed that all the performers should be distinguished amateurs, and that, to prevent comparisons, a new play should be performed. Tom, who had had considerable experience in amateur theatricals, was then prevailed on to do the stage management. The first few rehearsals revealed a state of things which filled him with great uneasiness. He had cast Mrs. Thornhill for the heroine and D'Artenare for her lover, and before a week had expired he noticed, with a distrust he could not conquer, that the love scenes were being rehearsed much more frequently than there was any necessity for. Although Tom was quite aware that diplomacy engendered distrust, he could not help feeling alarmed when one day he came across them unawares in the conservatory. She was listening eagerly to the whispered words he was breathing in the soft ripples of her brown hair, his arm was round her waist, and she made no effort, during the few seconds Tom remained, to wrench himself from that forbidden embrace. Tom went straight to the library to think it over.

Whatever the man might be, adventurer, beggar, or scoundrel, it was evident that Mabel loved him with all the strength of her weak soul. Tom wondered what diabolical charm the villain could possess that Mrs. Thornhill should prefer a lazy, sensual dawdler to the English gentleman who was serving his country out yonder. He didn't believe the fellow cared two straws for the foolish woman, but he probably knew that the Colonel had been extremely generous in the matter of settlements. If she went off the track it would break his old friend's heart; he knew how the Colonel doted on his wife. But would she? As a woman of the world she must know that the stream she would have to cross—if she elected to follow this man's fortunes—was more terrible than the Rubicon. The stream was not crossed yet, but he could see that her footsteps tended that way.

How could he save her? The Vicomte was not his guest—lucky for him he wasn't—and he dared not tell his hostess that a constant wife was a noble and beautiful thing; but he could send a telegram to the Colonel, telling him to return home at once as his wife was dangerously ill, but not to wire back he was coming for fear of alarming her. If he did that, mused Tom, she would bolt before he arrived. He could send the Colonel a telegram and he did. He could also change the play for one which would provide no love scenes at least for these two. He could do that, and he did as we have already chronicled. He could also try to make it warm for the Vicomte and get him out of the house, and so cure his hostess of his mad infatuation before the Colonel arrived. He couldn't pledge himself to accomplish this, but he would have a good try.

Next morning the storm burst. Mrs. Thornhill sent for him and asked him why he had cast the new play so curiously. Tom looked her full in the face as he replied: "D'Artenare, to conceal his passion for Kate, is made to carry on with Maud, who he dislikes, so I thought it best to cast your sister for Maud."

Mrs. Thornhill turned deadly pale and left the room. She knew that her secret was discovered. Now for the others. "I say, Tom," exclaimed Sir Patrick O'Hara, a genial Irish gentleman, bursting into the library, where Tom was writing a letter to the London manageress announcing the change in the programme, "there's a devil of a row going on. You've cast D'Artenare for Reginald Bamber, my wife's lover, and me for George, Mrs. Thornhill's lover; I suppose it's all right?"

"Quite," was the calm reply.

"Well, I'm deuced glad of it, for I'm hanged if I can see any fun in making love to one's own wife."

"You didn't always speak like that, Sir Patrick," replied Tom.

"No, my boy; when I was a poor man, living on my estate in Ireland, before the death of the Admiral made me a rich one, I remember saying to Fanny: 'My darling, your great charm in my eyes is the entire absence of those qualities which command admiration in the fashionable world.' But since I've lived in an atmosphere of scandal and fine phrases, and mixed with people who, if not remarkable for original thought, can tear a character into such tiny little shreds that one would be puzzled to find the pieces, I've changed my opinions. I have noticed that husbands who are always dangling about their wives' skirts are not popular, and that, between ourselves, is what I complain of. My wife's never happier than when she's with me, and when anyone speaks to her she blushes and looks down. It makes me wild. I've told her a hundred times that bashfulness and simplicity are not understood in the great metropolis, but she won't believe it. Why, I give you my word, Mr. Dunscombe, it was only the other day I overheard a lady say that bashfulness was only another name for slyness. Nobody notices my wife now. They treat her like a housemaid. If I could only see her with a crowd of admirers in her train I should be happy."

"A crowd!" said Tom musingly, for an idea had just entered his mind, "a crowd!"

Sir Patrick winked. "The more the better," he replied, "there's safety in numbers. They'd all spy on one another."

"Now look here, Sir Patrick," said Tom, "will you be guided by me in this affair, and promise if you see your wife behaving as you wish, not to speak till I give you permission?"

"I will," replied the baronet.

"Well, I think I know a way of curing your wife of this excess of affection. It will be rather a shock, I'm afraid."

"Let me see her the centre of an admiring throng and I'll stand the shock. Hush! here she comes."

Lady O'Hara was a striking contrast to Mrs. Thornhill, her sister. A slim, shy, affectionate little creature, literally worshipping her husband.

"Mr. Dunscombe," she exclaimed, with as much asperity as she could infuse into her soft voice, "I don't like the play at all; the motive, to begin with, is wicked in the extreme, and some of my speeches are most heartless and indelicate."

"Indeed," said Tom gravely, "I thought I had exercised a most rigid censorship; I don't think there's

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a line suggesting anything by which the merest school girl could anticipate her future. Will you please read me the lines?"

"Patrick may read the speech; I shall not do so," said the little lady.

"Give me your part," said her husband, and he read: "There are thousands of ladies, my lord, who are keenly alive to the advantages of securing a husband a little older than the majority of husbands. The older he is the less chance of a young wife being subjected to personal violence—the older he is the sooner she will become a widow."

"We will cut that speech," said Tom, thinking of Mrs. Thornhill and her husband.

But the lady was still unappeased. "I don't think the motive a good one," she said; "my uncle, the Bishop of Zanzibar, has promised to be present."

"I don't see why your uncle should complain," interrupted Sir Patrick. "The clergy have it all their own way on Sundays, they might let us enjoy ourselves on week-days."

"Be quiet, dear. And then, why is Mr. D'Artenare to play my lover? I am sure Patrick would do it quite as well."

"I am afraid I can't agree with you there," said Tom. "The part is a very romantic one, and your husband's figure quite unfits him for romantic parts."

"I do not think so," said Lady O'Hara haughtily.

"Too stout," said Tom, shaking his head. "Now, the Vicomte will look the adventurer to perfection. Slim, pale, a beautifully shaped nose, and an air of distinction conferred by a first-class tailor."

But Lady O'Hara didn't like the Vicomte. "I think his stare most offensive," she said, "the way he looks at you."

"His looks may be a little more ardent than good taste permits. But looks are difficult things to interpret. He may only admire you as he would a beautiful picture. Remember he is pretending to be madly in love with you."

"Yes, that's the worst of it. I see in the part that he has to kiss me."

Sir Patrick now lost all patience. "Now, my dear," he cried, "do be reasonable; these pastoral sentiments are quite unfitted for the vortex of London society."

"Oh! Patrick, you wouldn't like another man to kiss me, would you?" she said, bursting into tears.

"I know how deep is your attachment," replied her husband soothingly, "but if you could only suppress it in public I should have no cause of complaint. Are you aware, my darling, that people call us the Siamese twins? Think of that. Now, if you can only innocently, quite innocently, my darling, contrive to inspire one of our friends with an incurable platonic passion."

The poor little woman gazed at her lord bewildered. "I am sure I couldn't," she gasped; "I shouldn't know how to do it."

"Tell everyone in strict confidence," said Tom gravely, "that you are a little weary of your husband; you would scarcely believe how greatly your popularity would increase."

Lady O'Hara shook her head. "I could never do that," she said, with an air of conviction, gazing fondly at her husband who responded with a groan, "unless I really grew tired of him, and as I am not likely to do that I must decline to play this part unless Patrick is my lover."

At this moment the Frenchman's voice was heard. "Keep him out of the way while I persuade your wife," Tom whispered, and the Baronet darted out.

"I can speak to you without reserve, Mr. Dunscombe, because you are such an old friend," said Lady O'Hara. "Some people find no attraction in goodness. My husband has sadly changed. He actually wishes me to imitate my sister."

"I should be sorry to see you do that," said Tom gravely. "I know I may confide in you," he continued, in reply to her questioning look, "for I am sure you love your sister very dearly."

"Oh, yes," was the reply. Lady O'Hara turned pale; she felt what was coming.

Tom went on: "Colonel Thornhill is my very dear friend. I have no right to interfere, but I cannot help seeing that people are talking about his wife as they have no right to talk. D'Artenare is a scoundrel, who has done this sort of thing before. Woe to the woman who listens to his insidious tongue."

Tom knew nothing of the Frenchman's past, but he wanted to frighten Lady O'Hara, and he succeeded. She gazed at him horror-stricken. Could it be possible that Mabel was prepared to wreck her husband's honour and outrage society? She thought of the paragraphs in the newspapers, and she thought of what her sister's life would be after she had slipped out of the public mind. She was not so unsophisticated but that she could picture two guilty wretches hiding away, probably under a false name, and the woman awaking one day to find the love look absent from the eyes of the man she had staked her chances of salvation for.

But supposing they were exaggerating the circumstances. Mabel, she felt convinced, loved this man; still she did not think she would cast the die, although the dice box was in her hand. She was acting imprudently, no doubt, but Mabel was older than she was, and perhaps after all——

She stopped thinking and looked at Tom, who had followed the train of her thoughts. "People who dream pleasant dreams on the edge of a precipice generally fall over." The momentary hope died away in Lady O'Hara's mind.

"Oh, Mr. Dunscombe, what is to be done?"

"You must save her," said Tom emphatically.

"I!" earnestly exclaimed her ladyship. "How?"

"By executing on this foreign gentleman what military men call a flank movement. Play the part I have cast you. Insist on constantly rehearsing with D'Artenare all the scenes you play together. And even when you are not rehearsing keep him by your side"—her ladyship gasped—"then gradually pretend to fall a victim to those fascinations which have exercised so baneful an effect on others. In a word, never leave your sister and this man together, and practise on him alone those charms which Sir Patrick foolishly wishes you to exercise on mankind generally." Silence.

"Oh, Mr. Dunscombe," broke in the little woman.

"You would not only please, and probably cure, your husband, but save your sister," went on Tom, with such an air of resolute conviction that his companion could only gaze at him in speechless amazement. After a most convincing speech Tom paused, and Lady O'Hara reflected. It was a dreadful thing to deceive one's husband, still it would only serve him right to punish him for daring to ask her to become what he called a fashionable wife. But to be obliged to tolerate the attentions of the Vicomte!

"Think," murmured the artful Tom, "your sister's honour; the cause is a good one."

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That decided Lady O'Hara, and she promised to do her best. Mrs. Thornhill and the Vicomte were, of course, considerably surprised when they found that Lady O'Hara had withdrawn her objections to the Vicomte playing her lover.

Whatever Mrs. Thornhill's feelings may have been, she was compelled to remain silent. She knew the construction which would be placed on anything she might say. The Vicomte was secretly pleased with the arrangement. He would now have an opportunity of conciliating an enemy. His position was critical, and he could not afford to make or even defy enemies.

Acting under the advice of Tom, Lady O'Hara at first proceeded with great caution. She had hitherto treated the Vicomte with scant courtesy, but she now led him to believe that she had been wrong, and that she was becoming gradually impressed with his numerous good qualities. She had one great advantage in the game she had set herself. The Vicomte's knowledge of woman was extensive but not general. The women he had known thought too much in one way. Of English ladies he knew next to nothing, and consequently had but little belief in woman's purity. So he nodded approvingly when Lady O'Hara informed him that since her marriage she had been dying for a little freedom.

The hot blood surged into her cheeks as she said this. She realised now how loathsome was the task she had set herself, but she had a purpose to achieve and would not go back. So the Vicomte got to know that a few months of married life had convinced her that the matrimonial tie was a great hindrance to perfect enjoyment, that her object in lavishing on Sir Patrick those attentions in public—attentions which the Vicomte must have noticed—was to make him weary of her and insist on her doing that which all the while her soul secretly yearned for.

She listened to his pretty speeches and appeared to acquiesce in the plans he began to sketch, faintly at first, of a bright and happy future. Still it is doubtful whether she would have succeeded in supplanting her sister but for the tact of the Vienna diplomatist.

Tom had the healthy Briton's face, simple, manly, honest and ingenuous, not a genius, but with ten times the brain power of the Vicomte. He allowed his enemy to pump him, and noted with secret glee the greed which stole into the adventurer's eyes when he learnt that on the Admiral's death Sir Patrick had settled £3,000 a year on his wife for her exclusive use and benefit but that Mrs. Thornhill was dependent on her husband, who, he had every reason to believe, had lost heavily in the Calcutta markets.

This greatly simplified matters, and the adventurer now began to treat his hostess with marked coldness. Pale and haggard, with no suspicion of the truth, Mrs. Thornhill saw with suppressed passion her sister gradually supplanting her with the man for whom she had been ready to face anything. To quarrel openly she dared not. She made a stout fight at first to retain the Vicomte, but the £3,000 a yearsa dly handicapped her.

At first Sir Patrick exhibited the greatest satisfaction at the change in his wife's manner, but as the weeks rolled on he thought she was reforming too thoroughly. Of course, it was delightful when his wife explained that as she was in the springtide of her youth no enjoyment ought to be denied her in that or the summer period, for was there not an autumn and a winter in store for poor woman, and in the winter would not the sweetness of life fade, producing wrinkles, dull eyes grey hairs and neglect?

Now all this was very nice and very artless, and Sir Patrick professed to be greatly delighted, and was profuse in his acknowledgment to Tom, to whom he ascribed the change. But as the day of performance neared he was not nearly so pleased as he pretended to be. It was all very well for Lady O'Hara to tell him that he must be mad to think a woman's heart was a sanctuary in which only one image was enshrined; probably his wife was right, but there were ways of saying things, and, candidly, he didn't like hers.

And then there was that foreign cad, D'Artenare. As a sensible man he could see that it was necessary for people who seldom acted to constantly rehearse, but there was no reason why Lady O'Hara should spend the entire day with him; why, even her sister was disgusted with her lenity and treated her with marked coldness. He was quite aware that he had begged his wife to imbue some fellow with an incurable platonic passion, but he didn't think this looked like a platonic passion.

So Sir Patrick grew as miserable as Mrs. Thornhill.

About a week before the performance Mrs. Thornhill gave a ball, and issued a prodigious number of invitations. With a crowd of people in the house it would be very strange if she did not find some opportunity of demanding an explanation from the Vicomte. But Tom was on the alert, and Lady O'Hara insisted on dancing with the Frenchman the whole evening, to the surprise of the guests and the disgust of Sir Patrick, who, drawing Tom into the billiard-room, gave vent to his feelings.

"Now this is all your doing, Mr. Dunscombe, and although I gave you my word of honour not to interfere till you gave me permission, I'm hanged if I can stand it."

"Why, what's the matter, Sir Patrick?" asked Tom soothingly.

"That foreign devil and my wife."

"Why, didn't you say," said Tom, "that the happiest day of your life——"

"Why do you always throw that unlucky speech in my face?" roared the Baronet. "I wanted an army of lovers, not one sly sneak like that D'Artenare. I'll break his neck before the night's over."

"What has he done?" asked Tom.

"I'll tell you. I had occasion to remark to my wife yesterday that I had seen them in the park yesterday through my field-glasses, and that from the look on the gentleman's face I judged him to be making love. Now what do you think my wife replied. 'Oh, dear, you cannot think how delightful to a woman who has all the brightness and freshness of unsullied youth is the love-making of an accomplished Frenchman. The ingredients of love-making, Patrick, are of course known to all, but it is the mixing which imparts the flavour. Oh, the French are the only people who know how to mix.'"

Tom nearly went into convulsions.

"But that isn't the worst of it. I came upon them in the conservatory just now, and I heard my wife say: 'Oh, dear! Eleven o'clock to-night? How could I find my way to Belper Lane in the dark? If my husband——' and then that frog-eating brute interrupted her, saying: 'Your husband, my dear lady, is of no consequence. Keep his plate full at meal times and he is happy.'"

"What did you do then?" said Tom, biting his lips and making desperate efforts to preserve his gravity.

"What did I do?" cried the infuriated Irishman, breathing heavily. "What *could* I do with the promise

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I made you staring me in the face? Nothing. I simply offered to dance with her. Would you believe it she told me to trot away and join the old fogies in the smoking room, and not to wait up for her, but to go to bed when I felt tired. Likely thing, go to bed. No. Relieve me, Tom Dunscombe, from that promise, and let me unbosom my soul in Belper Lane at eleven o'clock to-night."

At that moment a servant entered the room. Mrs. Thornhill wished to see him in the library. He found her greatly excited. Her husband would be home in an hour.

"Spare me, Mr. Dunscombe," she cried, "the scales have fallen from my eyes. Fanny has told me everything. How good you have been. But my husband! With that man here I dare not face him."

"Leave everything to me," said Tom. "I'll play his part next week. He shall leave here before your husband arrives."

Tom then had a conference with Lady O'Hara, and another with Sir Patrick, the result of which was that just as Mrs. Thornhill, half fainting, found herself in her husband's arms, Sir Patrick was administering a sound drubbing to the Vicomte D'Artenare in Belper Lane. A few months later Mrs. Thornhill accompanied her husband to India. Lady O'Hara goes out a good deal now, but never without Sir Patrick.

ARTHUR GOODRICH.

FOR A THOUSAND POUNDS.

"IF one of us only died what a good thing it would be for the other!"

So spake Felix Hynde a few minutes previously, as, preparatory to departing for a stroll to get rid of a fit of the "blues," he had stood carefully buttoning his overcoat.

Leaning back in his chair, Christopher Hewitt, with measured puff, had blown blue rings of fragrant smoke about his head, while enjoying dreams of a future that could never be his. His friend's remark, delivered so earnestly in a tone of great bitterness, had shattered his vision, and he had sat up to scrutinise the speaker's features through the uncertain twilight, and to think that he had never seen so weary a face before.

Hynde had gone—left in a miserable, melancholy mood—but his morbid utterance remained, and fitting itself to the rhythmical ringing of the bells of St. Dane's dinned itself into Christopher's ears, and presently put into his brain thoughts which appalled him.

"If one of us only died!"

Only he and Hynde could comprehend the awful significance of the speech and see the vista of terrible possibilities it opened out to them. Why, if one of them but died, the other one would be richer by £1,000. And in their present condition such a sum would be a fortune. Each was insured for that amount in a large life office. They had insured their lives together, years ago, when affluence was theirs, afterwards making wills, each leaving to the other his life policy in case of death before marriage.

In those days, these friendless orphans were young and careless. Both possessed good positions; each had a little money left him by his parents, and while their existence then was sunshine, both loved "the sweetest girl on earth"—the horizon on all sides was roseate, apparently prognosticating a life beyond, which they in their dreams oft enjoyed. They were fast friends—Hewitt had not a single relative in the world, and the only representative of the house of Hynde was an ancient aunt, whose means were so limited that but for her nephew, Felix, she must surely have starved—lived together, made no other friends, and admitted no outsiders to their confidences.

But the times altered. Clouds lowered o'er their house. Chris lost his position altogether, and Felix had his salary considerably reduced. Under the strain of this double drain, their resources soon diminished, and, Chris obtaining no employment, things went from bad to worse, until now the premiums of their insurance policies were within a day of being due, and they knew not how to meet them. Thus Chris reviewed the situation and sighed: "If one of us only died!"

He turned to his cigarette and endeavoured to float away again into the land of pleasant shadows, but the church bells rang out louder the parting words of Felix and gave him no rest. So he abandoned dreams, watched the glowing fire, and thought.

Yes, if one of them only died the other would be—well, not wealthy, but he would have sufficient to tide him and straighten the crookedness of the future. That was if one of them died.

"Well, why should not one die?"

The thought flashed through Hewitt's mind as he leant forward gazing into the fire. It seemed to have been born of a bright forked flame which lit the darkening room for a second. Outside, the bells caught it up—rang it out with a glee that was perfectly devilish—and seemingly to Chris announced his thoughts aloud to all the world, thoughts that were fearful, thoughts that frightened him, so that he stuffed his ears with his fingers, as though to shut them out; then there came a period of silence.

"Well, better for one to die," he thought presently. "Better for the other, better of course for both," and he laughed, then started back in his chair, for he fancied that Felix laughed out from the fire with him. He caught a momentary glance of Felix's face, wreathed in a malignant smile, ere it disappeared in the falling coals.

"Yes, one of us ought to die! Better one than both. Now which one—Felix or I?" So ran Hewitt's thoughts. Ah! that was the question—which? He was contented with life. He had grumbled occasionally, of course, and who does not when Fate presses unnaturally hard? Certainly he would not object to improving the conditions under which he lived it. Who would? Then, again, he was in love. A pretty face,

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crowned with a head of golden hair, and set with the bluest of blue eyes, which seemed to be the home of everlasting sunshine, floated across Chris's vision. Yes, he must live, and he must have money.

As for Felix—well, he was a bundle of complaints. A miserable cynic, he was never satisfied with anybody or anything, never on good terms with himself, and since he had been jilted, love to him was sour grapes. Even Diogenes was surely never worse than he. And had he not said: "If one of us only died"?

Of course, Felix was thinking then of himself, and the benefit Chris would derive from his death. Was he thinking that way? Was he going to commit suicide—the fool; or—and Hewitt grew clammy with a strange dread—was Felix going to murder him?

Murder him! How his skin seemed to undulate and quiver at the thought. Yet, perhaps, that was what Felix meant to do. He remembered now how taciturn Felix had become of late. But Hewitt determined that he would be one better, he would score the first point—he would kill Felix, and in such a way that no suspicion of murder, or even suicide, should attach itself to the death; it should appear purely accidental.

But he must be careful. Felix might strike the first blow, and then—Hewitt smiled as he thought how to score another point—how to prevent Felix, should he successfully attempt such a design, enjoying the anticipating reward—he would destroy the will he had made in Hynde's favour.

The idea amused him. What irony that would be to Felix; what a bitter disappointment. What irony to himself was the knowledge that, as a handsome living specimen of the Creator's omnipotence he was worth about £200 a year, when in full working order, and if sold right out on his physical merits would not command enough to provide them with drinks and smokes for a month.

Yet, as a dead man, as a useless, hideous corpse, he was worth £1,000. And the irony of the situation reflected the smallest of his own personality, showed him how utterly powerless he was to cope with the intangible sometimes that as nothing, nothing that he could feel, that he could take vengeance upon, and roused within him a wrath for which he could find no outlet.

Until Felix had spoken the fatal words, Hewitt had never thought how easily one could kill the other and enjoy the proceeds of the crime. That was probably because until now they had never been in such desperate straits. Had Felix kept his own idea secret, never uttering his reflections, he might with ease have carried it into action, for Hewitt was too much of a dreamer, much too contented with whatever position he found himself in to endeavour to rise above it.

But now he recognised the possibility, the practicability of the idea, though to ensure success he knew that great skill was needed, that great care would have to be taken so that there should remain no clue, which afterwards might prove his downfall. Then the death must not wear the appearance of murder or suicide. To all intents and purposes it must be accidental! Could he accomplish this? Could he kill Felix and make his death appear an accident? If he could, he saw £1,000 and happiness within his grasp! If he could not, then he himself would be the victim.

In such a contingency the pistol and the dagger were useless; the agent employed must possess an independent action and must defy discovery. Hewitt thought of poison, but of poisons he knew little beyond their names; he knew not which was the most efficient, the most difficult to trace. There was strychnine, nicotine, arsenic—arsenic! That seemed familiar to him. Of course, why had he not thought of it before! Felix was an arsenic victim; he took it regularly. If quite by accident he took an overdose it would kill him.

And there was no necessity for Hewitt to purchase the arsenic—that would have exposed him to considerable risk—for Hynde always kept a quantity in his desk. He bought the poison himself from a chemist in the Strand, to which fact this man would, later on, have to testify.

Now to administer it. Felix and Hewitt each had a liking for whisky—too much of a liking, perhaps—and the bottle was never allowed to become empty. A small quantity of arsenic in the spirit, of which Felix would undoubtedly partake when he returned, would settle the matter and he would be no more.

How easily the plot had smoothed itself into tangible, practical shape, and there was not the slightest chance of discovery.

"Felix must die!"

Chris spoke the words aloud, and the sound of his voice frightened him. He started up with a dazed brain—a mind clouded with a horrible phantasm. Had he been asleep and dreaming? No, everything had been too real, too practical. Gazing round the room he noticed that evening had given way to night, that the fire had burnt itself out, and he shivered. His lips were parched, his eyes tingled, and his brow was cold and wet with perspiration. He lighted the lamp with trembling hands and drew down the blinds.

He went to the cupboard and brought forth the whisky jar. He poured out a glass of the amber spirit, spilt some in raising it to his mouth, for his nerves were like slack wires in a wind, then, as the liquor burnt his lips, threw it beneath the grate and sank into a chair.

Perhaps it was poisoned already! Perhaps the very death he had so cunningly planned for Felix had been set for him. He sat silent for a while and his brain cooled. He realised that the thinking was past and that the time for action had arrived. He wiped his hands and face upon his handkerchief and went towards Felix's desk. As usual it was unlocked and he had no trouble in finding the small box labelled: "Arsenic. Poison." Taking it in his hand he emptied half its contents into the whisky and shook the bottle violently. Then he swept from sight the broken pieces of the tumbler, and procuring another, placed it beside the bottle on the table.

Then followed a hurried, frantic search for the will which he had given over to the care of Felix, but he failed to discover it. He turned out drawers, ransacked shelves, ran through books, and cursed at his non-success. But what folly this! He was safe now, of course, and he had Felix's will safe also.

Suddenly he heard Felix mounting the stairs. His step was light, and he was whistling as though he never had a care in the world. Hewitt hurried into his overcoat and hat, and opened the door of the room as Felix reached it.

"Hullo, Chris!" Felix said gaily. "Off for a stroll?"

Chris nodded, and noticed that Felix had indulged not wisely.

"You've left your morbid devil outside?" he asked with a forced laugh, without raising his eyes.

"Drowned him," was the laconic reply; "and I struck luck, too, my boy."

Chris hesitated on the threshold. He was fearful lest

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Felix should drink the whisky whilst he stood there, and fall dead at his feet.

"Yes. Met old Barlow," Felix ran on lightly, "and borrowed a tenner. Have a cigar?" offering Chris a handful.

Hewitt's hand shook as he took one and lighted it.

"Your hand shakes, Chris," said Felix as he disrobed. Then his eyes fell on the whisky. "Artful dog. Had a quiet liquor, eh? Well, you've saved me some."

Hewitt strode to the door.

"Here, Chris. I've a little present for you." And as Chris turned back, "I couldn't afford it, but I knew your passion for rubies, so I bought it."

Hynde held out a ring of dull gold—a ring of old-fashioned and clumsy make—set with a spendid ruby. Chris flashed the stone in the light and admired it, but he felt as though his legs would give way every minute, for with one hand on the fatal bottle, Felix watched him with a gaze that seemed to penetrate his brain and read his thoughts.

"Want a sovereign, old man?" asked Felix.

Hewitt shook his head, and put the ring into his pocket.

"Stop and play chess?" said Hynde, drawing a chair to the table. "It's cold out; and, as I'm alive, you've let the fire out. Well, you're a good sort."

"Back at twelve," said Chris as he closed the door.

He almost fell down the stairs and nearly upset the postman outside.

"Anything for me?" he inquired hastily.

"Hewitt?"

"Yes," and he snatched the proffered letter from the astonished postman's hand, and rushed away, cramming it into his pocket as he ran.

Felix had said it was cold, but Christopher Hewitt was uncomfortably hot. He sped away from the busy street, and at last, out of breath, reached the Embankment and dropped into his seat.

When he returned, he knew he would find a dead man in his room. He wondered if Felix were dead yet.

* * * * *

Felix listened to Hewitt's clatter down the stairs and heard the door close with a bang. Then he sat down in the chair and pulled from his pocket an official-looking document—the last will and testament of Christopher Hewitt—which he perused with evident delight. A tap at the door startled him, and he rose as the servant came in and handed him a letter.

He tore open the envelope, and while he read the contents his eyes almost burst from his head. He reeled back with a cry—a cry of joy and despair.

He was wealthy beyond his most ambitious dreams. The letter was from Bell and Bell, solicitors, and informed him that his old aunt—apparently so poor—had just died, leaving him a fortune of £50,000.

Good Heavens! £50,000, and he a murderer! For ere now the ring which he had given to Chris—a poisoned bauble which, pressed upon the finger, injected into the blood a most virulent poison secreted in its centre—must have done its work.

But there might be time yet to save him. His friend's favourite walk he knew was the Embankment, and he hurried into his hat and coat. How his brain reeled. He grasped the bottle, poured out a glass of spirits and drank it at a gulp; it would calm his nerves! It calmed his nerves for ever. He fell with a gasp to the floor in the agonies of death.

* * * * *

Chris felt in his pockets for a match to light his cigarette, his hand came in contact with the letter and the ring, and he pulled them out. Who could the letter be from! He had not a relative in the world. He ripped it open, read it beneath the light of a lamp, and strangled a cry of horror in his heart.

Heir to £8,000, and a murderer! Good Heavens, what a fool! What a fate! The letter was from Bell and Bell, and told him that Mrs. Janet Crawley had left him £8,000!

Crawley? Where had he heard that name? Then he remembered she was Felix's aunt, and how, when once she called upon them, Felix being absent, he made tea for her and entertained her.

But he was a murderer! No, perhaps it was not too late to save Felix, and he turned and raced in the direction of his lodgings. He pushed the letter back into his pocket and thrust the ring upon his finger. He felt a slight scratch, ran a few steps farther, then crashed to the earth a corpse!

REGINALD BAIRD.

Result of Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 19.

THE first prize of £5 this week goes to Mr. H. P. Wright, of 72, Evelina Road, Nunhead.

Prizes of £1 each have been sent to Mr. H. Staton, 14, Amherst Street, Withington, Manchester; Mr. J. N. Crowle, R.N., 43, Portland Road, Devonport; and Miss Florence Piper, 9, Ethelbert Crescent, Cliftonville, Margate.

The sum of £2 has been sent to Miss Sullivan, Hill House, Bandon, co. Cork, Ireland, who tied with the winner of the first prize.

The title of the story was "A RIDE, A WITCH, AND A WIFE."

Jumbled Story Competition.—22.

ON page 697 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *November 30th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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THE THIRST FOR GOLD

LAST July, when the days were long, and the sun blazed down into the valleys, until even the lizards hunted the shadows of the rocks, I was driving down to the railway with a party from Ballena. The dust was suffocating, and our journey was by no means one of pleasure. The sun was near the meridian when it was suggested that we should stop to water the team, and take a bite of lunch. A halt was made beneath a grove of live oaks, and we were about to discuss the contents of our hamper when a pedestrian came in sight.

She—for it was a woman—came trudging along the road, half hid in the cloud of dust raised by her feet. As she drew near we saw that she was poorly clad. Her face was reddened by the sun where the perspiration had washed away the grey dust with which she was otherwise covered. She was by no means old, and, despite the dust and sunburn, showed traces of beauty. Her evident weariness could not hide her grace.

On reaching our halting-place she laid down the little bundle she was carrying, and inquired if she was on the Campo Road. On being told that she was not, and that she was increasing her distance from that settlement, her eyes filled with tears and she sank down upon the withered grass by the road-side, sobbing bitterly. Of course every effort was made to console her. At length she regained control of her emotions, and told us her story and the object of her lonely tramp.

She and her husband had lived, content and happy, in a little mining town in the north; but the bad times came, and he was thrown out of organisation. Then the council of two planned for the future; but, alas! the planning was in vain, and the little hoard for the rainy day rapidly waned. The rain was not a passing summer shower, but a pouring season. There were dark misgivings for the twins, but they had the light of youth and hope to help them.

One day they read in a city paper a wild, fabulous tale of the lost Peg-Leg Mine of the Colorado Desert. To be sure, it told of drought and death, but the pockets of the dead men were always found filled with gold. Then came a lusting for the treasure at the end of the rainbow and the self-assertion which told the young man that he could do that in which others had failed. The resolution was taken, followed by a parting, with bright hope shining through the tears and kisses.

Thus the young husband left the bonnie wife and started on his mad errand. She had heard from him once from the little village on the edge of the sandy waste. Since then days had come and gone, months had followed each other, nearly a year had passed, and now, weary of waiting, the woman sought for him. "He is out there," she said, "and living. I dream of him. I can see him waiting for me. My heart even tells me how he looks."

Here her face was illuminated with her confidence. We dared not tell her what our knowledge and experience taught; that his bleached bones were lying where a blessed death had relieved his direful agony. What was the use? She was evidently half-mad. We did what we thought best—told her "if he were alive he would soon come to her. That to attempt to find him without a guide was certain death." At last we persuaded her to return with us to the coast, but only after promising that we would aid her in her search. On our return to the city, she was placed with a charitable employment, under mild restraint.

The summer had passed away, the autumn rains had come, and with them the presumption that the desert was as endurable as it ever becomes, when one of my clients came to me with a story of a wonderful mine lying out in the arid waste. He had a sketch-map showing bearings by which it could be found. The map, with some marvellously rich specimens of quartz, had been found by an Indian upon the body of a dead man out upon the desert.

I laughed at the story and ridiculed my friend for entertaining it; but he insisted that every fact pointed to riches, and that the lost Peg-Leg only waited for us

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to locate it. Well, I am somewhat of a fool myself at times, so I allowed him to persuade me to undertake the journey. The consideration is not material: but it was to be satisfactory to me in any event.

Our point of departure was Campo, a small settlement near the western edge of the dread and dismal sands. Our party consisted of my client, an Indian guide, and myself. We were well equipped for our search, being provided with a good waggon and team, provisions, bedding, tools, and instruments, and a cask of water.

Soon we were out upon the trackless waste, where we found much to interest us, but nothing to inspire a desire to visit such a region again. Great dunes of sand rose before us like gigantic billows of grey; now and again these gave place to bare rocks. Far away there seemed to be lakes, from which the sun's rays glinted as from a mirror. These, when we reached them, proved to be beds of gypsum or of salt. At times the horses dragged their weary way through deep, white sand, and we alighted and walked to ease their load.

Again we rolled over bare rock, or hard clay, where great crevices gaped open and seemed to have no bottom.

The only animals were the snakes, lizards, and horned toads, which lay in the shadows of the rocks. High up in the clear sky now and then a buzzard or a hawk could be seen—the latter intent upon small prey, the former listlessly hovering as though anticipating the death of something larger.

The air was thick with the heat, and hot currents were plainly discernible as they rushed to the cooler strata above. There were breezes, but they felt as if the furnace gates of Hades had been opened for a moment to take in a lost soul.

The plan of our journey was to reach the first night a water-hole a score of miles from the edge of the desert. In view of the possibility of its being dry, the cask of water had been provided. From this point we were to drive on the morrow to another well five miles distant, where water was known to be unfailing. This was to be our camp and base of operations; in fact, it was a station laid down in the sketch-map in my client's possession.

At last the first day's destination was reached. The team was worn and jaded with the hot, hard work, the men in not much better condition. We all hurried to the little basin to draw some water for the horses. The bucket struck the hard, dry bottom with a hollow thud—there was no water there. The disappointment was sickening, even though we had provided against it. The only thing to be done, however, was to pitch a camp, deal out the water sparingly from the cask, and to push on in the cool of the dawn to the well beyond.

We were going about our preparations, when a loud exclamation from one of my companions drew us all three to the waggon to stare in dismay at the empty cask. By some dire mischance the bung had worked loose, and the precious fluid had been wasted on the thirsty sands. There had been less than half of it left when we had last quenched our thirsts and given our poor beasts a bucketful between them.

The accident was demoralising and foreshadowed hardship for the night, if not actual danger for the morrow. However, we made the best of it, and with dry throats and parched lips we finally dropped off to sleep, despite the whinneying of our thirsty animals. At the first glimpse of dawn we were up and away—one driving, the others walking—in the direction of the other well.

Under the conditions it was a question of hours—not miles. It seemed as if flesh and blood could never bear it. With faces burnt and blistered, feet galled, legs weary, throats drawn, lips cracked, and tongues swollen, we dragged ourselves along. The poor, panting horses, with drooping ears, would stop every few minutes to rest until they were goaded on. What reproaches can be read in a dumb brute's eye—reproaches that can never be answered!

At last, with the sun high up and blazing upon us we saw a few withered plants in the distance. As we approached, we could see that they were but dead stalks—ominous indications of drought. We drew nearer, and at last reached the hole from which we were to draw water—stale, flat, and hot, but water after all. Alas! No! The well was dry. Good God! Bereft of reason we threw ourselves down upon the rocks. How long the stupor of despair lasted I do not know.

I remember looking up to the sky—perhaps to pray—again I do not know—and there I saw a hovering buzzard. This, then, was to be the end! The awful suggestiveness of the presence of the carrion bird frightened me back from the apathy which had taken possession of my soul. I looked about me. My companions sat with their heads sunk upon their knees; the poor horses had lain down in their harness, still attached to the waggon.

The thought: "May not instinct be stronger than

There was no water there.

reason?" came to me like an inspiration. I walked over to the beasts, loosened the traces, took off the neck-yoke, and tied the lines to their collars. Instantly they both rose, and started slowly off towards a reef of rocks a couple of miles away. I looked at my crouching comrades; I spoke to them, but they did not reply. I snatched up a bucket and a canteen from the waggon, and started after the horses.

My recollection fails me here. I only know what I did from the result. I indistinctly remember seeing the horses disappear behind the rocks, and wishing that I could reach their shade, there to lie down and die. With this object in view I must have staggered on. Then came oblivion. My recollection of my return to conciousness begins with an impression of great comfort and of water—pure, clear water, and plenty of it, my face and hair dripping with it, my clothing drenched with it. What luxury! what delight! I remember opening my eyes and looking about.

The first object I saw was a goblin, a vile and horrid figure—a semblance of a man, with long, tangled, white hair and beard, a brown and wrinkled visage, and frightful eyes, the nails of feet and hands grown into long claws. Scattered about him were the skeletons of

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rats and snakes. This creature gesticulated and gibbered hideously at me.

"What delirium is this?" I thought. Then, glancing skyward, I saw the buzzard still hovering overhead. I remembered him, and then, as I grew more into myself again, I saw the horses standing near by; my bucket filled with water stood beside me. It was no dream; it was a verity; my life was saved.

I sprang to my feet. As I did so my hideous companion also rose and began a wild dance of joy about me.

"She sent you! She sent you!" he screamed. "Where is she?"

"Yes," I answered, for I now saw that I was dealing with a madman; "she sent me; we will go to her."

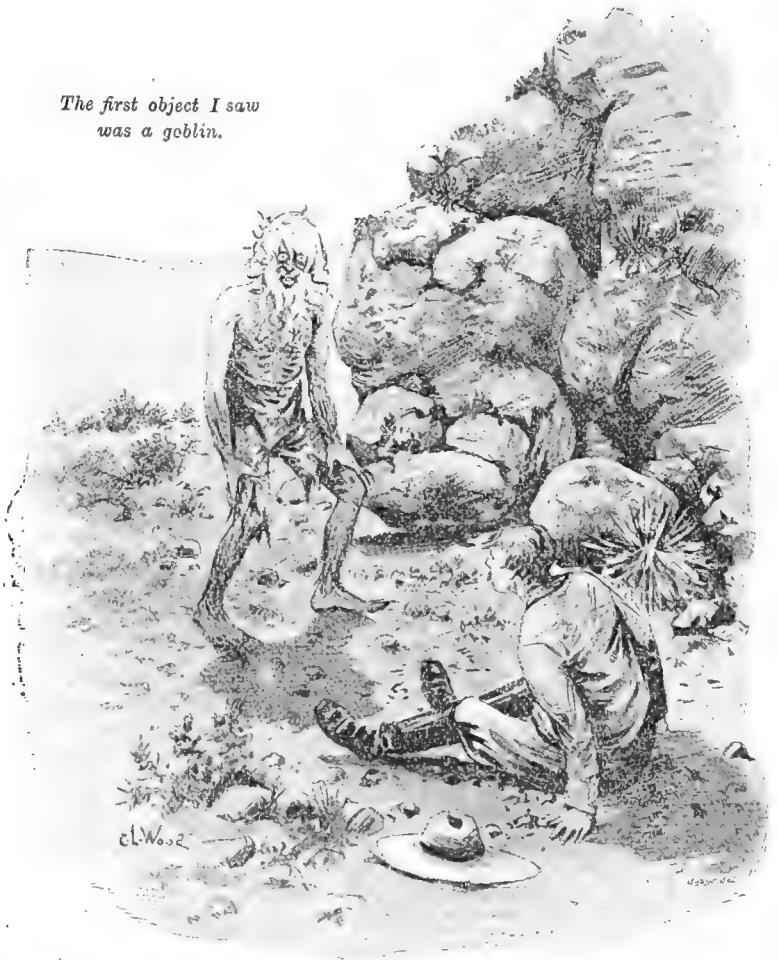
I went over to the horses, which were standing by a pool in the rock; it was evident that they had drunk their fill. I replenished the canteen which had been slung over my shoulder, jumped upon the back of one of the horses, and bade my stranger companion mount the other.

"Let us hurry," said I.

"To her?" he inquired.

"Yes," I answered. "Come, hurry."

We started on the back trail as rapidly as the heavy sand would permit. Fortunately, there had been no wind to obliterate the tracks, for had there been I should have had great difficulty in retracing my steps.



The first object I saw was a goblin.

After travelling, perhaps, a mile, the waggon could be seen in the distance. What was the fate of my companions? Were they still alive? Were they still where I had left them? Or had they wandered off as men do in that awful place when urged by the craze of thirst?

It was not long before I could see them. Their bodies lay prone upon the rocks. We reached them. Thank Heaven! they were still alive, but unconscious. A little water was poured between the swollen lips, their faces bathed with the precious liquid, and back, back they came from their years of purgatory.

It was not until the horses were once more hitched to the waggon, and we were about to start off in the direction of the water, that I found time to think of the mad stranger, who now began to clamour with the greatest violence, and pointed to the west with his skinny claws.

"To her! To her!" he shrieked.

It was then the memory of the dusty wayfarer of the past summer came to me.

"Yes, she is waiting for you," said I: "but first we must have water—and gold," I added cynically, half aloud.

His face lighted up with intelligence for a moment.

"Of course—the gold. I had forgotten the gold!" he exclaimed; "the beautiful red gold—and the diamonds—aye, the glorious stones. Yes, we will take them to her." He paused, then frantically screamed: "But they are not yours, they are mine—hers and mine!"

Here was a new phase in the situation—were we to fulfil our wild mission after all?

We had kept a chart of our journey so far, by prismatic compass and odometer. Our latitudes and departures were quickly calculated. Sure enough, we were in the vicinity of the point noted in the rough map. It was two miles further east—about the position of the water-hole.

The horses were jaded, but they knew that water was ahead, and they responded to a stronger urging than perhaps they would have received had not the allurement of fortune lain ahead.

We reached the water. We all threw ourselves upon the ground and drank, the horses pushing their muzzles beside us into the pool; and then we washed, drenching ourselves, clothes and all. After all, there was no thought of anything but drinking and eating and sleeping that night.

While we were opening some tins of food, the poor idiot darted from us; before we knew what

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he was about, we saw him returning with a snake which he had killed. Immediately he began tearing off the skin with his teeth. It was too evident how the poor creature had contrived to live. He had not been fed by the manna of heaven, but by the creeping things—symbols of the lost. And this from the thirst that knows no assuaging, the torture of lifetimes, the thirst for gold.

Early on the morrow our position was verified. It was as close as anything could be from so primitive a source as the dead man's sketch. Here—or near here—was the lost Peg-Leg Mine. "Now for the glittering gold," said we all. There was no indication of the likelihood of it. We were upon a little granitic island—a deep depression in which formed the life-giving reservoir—in the midst of a sea of sand.

"Where is the gold?" was eagerly demanded of our goblin host.

"Gold? Where? Are you blind?" he answered. "See!" And he gathered up the sand, letting it trickle through his fingers. "Gold for her; gold to buy the world; she will be a queen!" Darting back to the granite, he detached some crystals of tourmaline with his distorted claws. "See the gems!" he continued. "I will make her a crown from her own gold and her own gems," and thus he gibbered of wealth and the bonnie wife.

The horses were hitched up again, the cask filled and carefully stopped. To quiet our mad companion, a small sack was filled with sand, another with tourmaline, and we started slowly upon our homeward progress. It was a tedious, weary journey, and the sun pelted down upon us. But we knew that the next night would see us safe in the foothills, and we were thankful.

Our weird companion chattered ceaselessly. "Where is she? When shall I see her?" were his reiterated questions. "She is waiting over there," he said, once or twice, pointing out over the sand. To humour him we followed his direction, which did not take us from our path; for path there was none. Any straight line is a road from the desert; any destination out of it a haven of delight.

Late in the afternoon of the second day the madman exclaimed: "There she is!" and, before we could stop him, he had rushed frantically ahead of us, with a speed too great for us to follow. We saw in the distance a black object, which, as he approached it, rose high in the air, and hovered over him. It was the buzzard.

As we drew up to the spot from which it had flown, we found a skeleton partly covered by the sand; and there were bits of a woman's raiment.

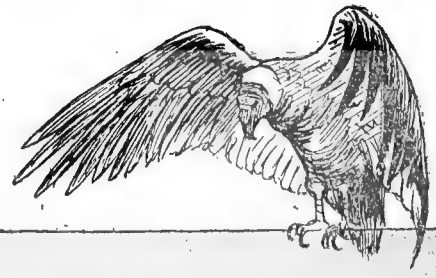
The crazy man clasped the ghastly fragments in his arms.

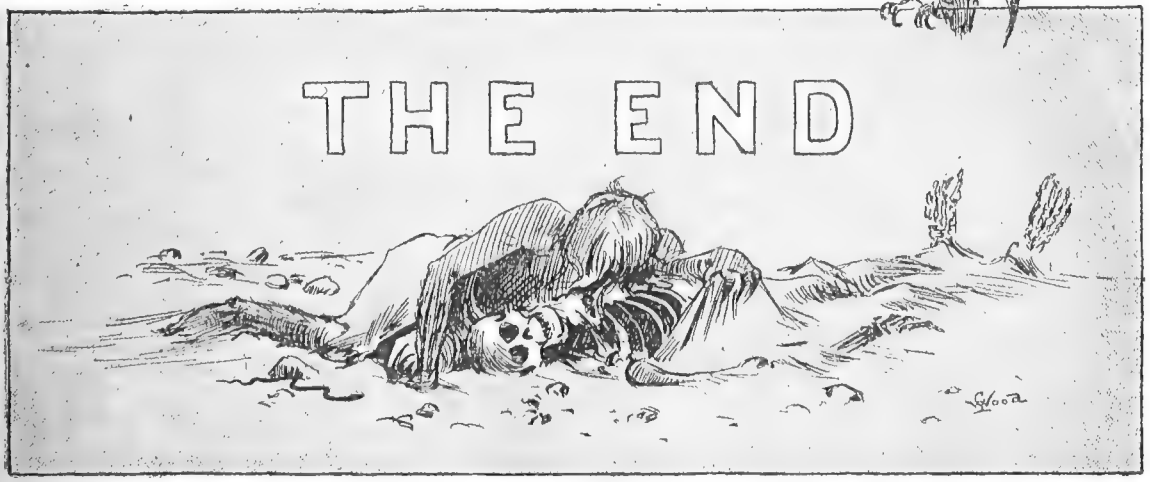
"It is she!" he exclaimed. "She waited for me."

We tried to disengage him from the skeleton. He struggled for a moment, then ceased, but the fierce embrace was unrelaxed. We looked at him—he was dead. We glanced up involuntarily—the buzzard still hovered overhead.

A deep grave was dug in the sand; the two bodies were lowered into it, still locked together, and the bags of sand and tourmaline dropped beside them. We bade them a few sad words of farewell and shovelled back the sand.

ALLEN GOODMAN.





The Christmas Double Numbers of PEARSON'S MAGAZINE and of MELODY will be ready on December 1st. One Shilling each.

From the HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY *to his elder brother, the* HON. FRANCIS GALLOWAY.

Grand Pacific Hotel, Chicago,
April 12th, 1888.

DEAR FRANK,—It is ages since I have heard from you, but I suppose everything goes on as usual and that you can find nothing to write about. When I wrote last I told you of my engagement to Miss Josie Fairfield, only daughter and heiress of Jeremiah Fairfield; and I think I gave you a fair description of your future sister-in-law. Old Jeremiah is behaving very handsomely, and is going to plank down a fair share of his dollars in hard cash. I am in excellent condition, and, to use a favourite expression of my *fiancée's*, "am just having a lovely time."

Everybody here makes an awful fuss over me, and will insist on calling me "Lord Galloway." Titles here are held in the highest veneration; but the majority of the people I have met don't seem to know the difference between an Honourable and a Marquis. My future father-in-law took me over his pig-sticking establishment yesterday, and each time we came to a group of butchers at work he would stop them for an instant and say: "This is Lord Galloway, my future son-in-law."

There is one curious mistake that everyone has made here, and that is, that they have all taken it for granted that I am the eldest son, and heir to the title, although I have never done or said anything to cause them to believe so. As old Fairfield has already told all his friends that I shall be Viscount Decateur, and consequently his daughter a Viscountess, I hardly dare now to undeceive him, in case he should want to break off the match. My fair *fiancée* also has told all her girl friends that on the death of my father she will be Viscountess Decateur; so that I really see nothing for it but to leave them in ignorance of the true state of the case until after the wedding, which has been fixed for this day week. Consequently, when you receive this, my proverbial ill-luck will have deserted me, and I shall be the happy possessor of a millionaire bride.

I am sincerely attached to Miss Fairfield; but as I told you in my last letter, my father-in-law elect, as they say over here, is the worst specimen of a low-bred Yankee that I have ever set eyes on.—Your affectionate brother,

FRED.

From the HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY *to the* HON. FRANCIS GALLOWAY.

New York,
May 12th, 1888.

DEAR FRANK,—The affair went off splendidly, and without a hitch. All the Chicago papers teemed with accounts of the brilliant ceremony, and the magnificent presents made to the bride. Unfortunately, they all accepted it as a fact that I am the future Lord Decateur, and I have not yet had the courage to undeceive my bride. As we sail for England next week, I shall not say anything about the mistake, but will leave it until she meets you, and finds out that you are the heir, and not myself. One paper in Chicago asserted that I should soon be a Duke, as my father, the Duke of Decateur, was in a very precarious state of health. That was a good stretch of imagination for a Chicago journalist. Good-bye, old fellow.—Your affectionate brother,

FRED.

From MRS. FREDERICK GALLOWAY *to her father,* JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD.

Grand Hotel, London,
June 10th, 1888.

DEAR PA,—I am writing to you with a broken heart. I have been the victim of a most shameful imposture, and I am the miserable, unhappy wife of the vilest of scoundrels. My husband is not Lord Galloway. He will never be a Viscount! He will never own Decateur Castle! He will never sit in the House of Lords! But he will always be a miserable, sneaking, pauper younger son! How could you let me marry him without finding out all about him! Your carelessness—ignorance, I may in charity call it—has ruined your daughter's life and wrecked her prospects for ever. I am coming home immediately; for I will never live with the wretched impostor who gained my affections under false pretences. I dare not face the girls in Chicago; so meet me in New York and advise me what to do.—I sail on the *Umbria* next Saturday. Your broken-hearted daughter,

JOSIE.

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Cablegram from JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD TO MRS. FREDERICK GALLOWAY.

"Right. Come home. Will meet *Umbria* at dock.
FAIRFIELD."

From MESSRS. RUDGE, FUDGE, STUDGE, TWENTYPEST AND RUDGE, *Solicitors, to the* HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY.

300, Lincoln's Inn Fields, July 30th, 1888.

DEAR SIR,—We have received the copy of the *Chicago Tribune* forwarded to us by you, and have made inquiries as to whether the advertisement to which you directed our attention is, in America, a legal service of notice of suit for divorce. We find as follows:

That in the State of Illinois, in which State Chicago is situated, in cases of non-residence, uncertainty of respondent's whereabouts, or living out of the jurisdiction of the United States, publication of notice of suit in a county newspaper for a period of four weeks is sufficient and good legal service. We have also ascertained that in the event of no notice of defence being put in, judgment would go by default.

In regard to your other questions, we are not sufficiently acquainted with the divorce laws of America to advise, but we have always heard that divorces would be obtained in Chicago on almost any plea. We would recommend you to write at once to a resident lawyer in the town where the suit has been instituted, or to go there yourself at once.—Yours faithfully,

RUDGE, FUDGE, AND CO.

From the HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY *to his brother, the* HON. FRANCIS GALLOWAY.

Grand Pacific Hotel, Chicago,
Sept. 20th, 1888.

DEAR FRANK,—The agony is over. Yesterday the court, in response to the demand of my late bride, annulled the marriage which had taken place between us. The annulment was granted on the ground that the petitioner's consent to the marriage had been obtained by fraud and false representation on my part. Numerous witnesses swore that I had called myself "Lord" Galloway and had stated that I was heir to Viscount Decateur. Of course, my word was no good against all this. Old Fairfield, who gave evidence, described me as "damaged goods," and the judge paid no attention to me.

Indeed, I was told beforehand that the judge was sure to grant the plaintiff's petition. The fact is, this worthy is a candidate for a vacant judgeship in the Court of Appeal, and did not dare to run the risk of losing old Fairfield's influence. Judges over here are elected by popular vote; and old Fairfield, besides having the influence which is always attendant on great wealth, employs thousands of men in his pig-sticking establishment, and of course controls their voices. Thus it is said that no judge who aspires to a higher office or even to re-election, ever dares to say him nay. Moreover, I am told that this old hog-butcher's political influence is so great that he controls half the State Legislature, and can get any bills he likes passed by it; and that if the judge had refused to annul my marriage with his daughter, he would have had a special Act declaring it null and void put through the Legislature.

Although unquestionably it was very wrong to allow these toadies and title-worshippers to continue in their self-created delusion that I was the eldest son, yet I certainly had nothing to do with originating that belief. That was simply the offspring of a combination of ignorance and sycophancy.

I am going to remain here for a few weeks, as I have gone into a little wheat speculation which I hope may prove remunerative. If it fails, I shall be, as they say here, "dead broke."—Your affectionate brother,

FRED.

Cablegram from RUDGE, FUDGE, AND CO. *to the* HON. FREDERICK GALLOWAY.

London, Oct. 10th, 1888.

"Your father and elder brother were both drowned yesterday off Cowes while out yachting. Yacht capsized. We await instructions from you.
RUDGE, FUDGE, AND CO."

From JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD TO LORD DECATEUR.

400, Drexel Boulevard, Chicago,
Oct. 12th, 1888.

MY LORD,—I red with the deapest regret of the terible calamity which has overtook you, and I hurry to ofer you my condolations. My daughter is real sick with grief, and says as she just longs to be by your side in your trubble. Now, my lord, I am willing to say, "Let bigones be bigones," and let us patch up this little matter. No one is to blame but I, for it was I as forced Josie to throw you up. I seperatted two loving harts, and am real sorry. Shall Josie come to you? there is nothing like simpathy in trubble. If you and Josie will make it up, I will come down handsome. The ceremony could be performed quiet in my house or at your hotel; although so far as ceremony is consarned, I think marriages are made in heaven, and no earthly jedge has a right to unmake them. My daughter sends her love, and says as she and I will come round to see you this evening. I trust your lordshipp will receive us with the same forgivvin spirit with wich we come. I remain, my lord, yours for ever.

JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD.

Letter from the VISCOUNT DECATEUR *to* JEREMIAH FAIRFIELD.

Grand Pacific Hotel, Chicago,
Oct. 12th, 1888.

SIR,—I have just waded through your imbecile epistle, and am now thanking God that your daughter's ignorance and narrow-minded ambition has saved me from being cursed with a father-in-law who is capable of producing such a document. I regret that it is not convenient to me to agree with you in your newly-formed opinion that marriages are made in heaven. I would also advise you that as your daughter will henceforth be branded in the English matrimonial market as—using an expression which you once applied to me as well as to the pork with which you feed the public—"damaged goods," you will be wise to try to dispose of her elsewhere.

In conclusion I notify you that I am wearing a pair of heavy shooting-boots, and that I think it would be as well for you not to come to see me. I leave for England to-night.—Yours,

DECATEUR.

RANDOLPH MAYNES.

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LASCA.

IT was not in the Quartier Latin, but next door to it, and everyone knows just where it is, too. *Quarante-cinq*, Rue La Grande—why "La Grande," nobody did know. The street was narrow, the houses high. One higher than the rest frowned down upon them. This was the one that had Jean Boullé's bake-shop. Perhaps because Jean's buns were good and two for *cinq sous*, perhaps because the top of the house had a skylight, M'sieur lived there.

Who was M'sieur? *Ciel!* how do I know?

He was a painter named Heywood, but everybody called him "M'sieur," that's all I know.

Who am I? I might say I don't know that either. One changes every seven years, and I am seven times seven. I'm another painter, and I was—but this story is not about me, but M'sieur and Mademoiselle Fetherston and—Lasca.

I had half of M'sieur's studio and painted every day. We had often the same models.

M'sieur was tall, and strong, and dark; English, very English.

Most Englishmen have no atmosphere. They cannot paint; they have nothing dainty. But M'sieur could paint. He had travelled much; Europe, Africa, America, all he painted. I have travelled, too, when I saw M'sieur's pictures. They made one feel the places. One day I came to the studio and found M'sieur painting at a strange picture.

Miss Fetherston—*Dieu!* the names these Americans have—sat near, modelling. She was a pupil of M'sieur's learning to sculp. How? You say not "to sculp"? What then? "Sculpture." *Ah; peste!* on the first Englishman. French is civilised, why cannot all speak it?

But M'sieur's picture? It was a large canvas, a stretch of dull brown prairie with long wavering grass. A herd of fierce cattle was in the distance, their leader tossing his horns madly. A dark black cloud overhung the blue sky. In the foreground was a pony, what you call him, mustard? No, mustang. A man was in the saddle, and a woman's form was dimly outlined as if she were about to spring behind the man. That was all. It was only roughly sketched in, but there was something odd about the picture. There was power in every hurried stroke of the brush, a subtle undercurrent that filled you with a fierce, wild longing for freedom.

Just as I entered the room that June day, M'sieur flung down his brush.

"I'll never do it!" he said impatiently.

"What makes you?" I asked, laying my hand on his shoulder. M'sieur and I were good friends—then.

"Ah! you!" he said, turning his head. He had been too absorbed to see me when I entered. He continued: "I can never paint this picture; I cannot find a model for Lasca."

"What is it?" I asked. "There is a story to it?"

"Yes," he answered, "a Texas story, of the Great Norther, a wind storm they have over there. The cattle flee from it and any one caught before them is trampled to death. The only chance for life is to shoot your horse, get under his body, and let the herd dash over you. The story is of a Texan ranger and his sweetheart; how they fled before the storm and cattle, how the mustang fell, and the girl flung herself on her lover's breast, dying to save him." M'sieur's eyes had kindled as he spoke, and his face flushed. "There's a poem about it," he added, "and my picture is where it says:

> "Was that thunder? I grasped the cord
> Of my swift mustang without a word;
> I sprang to the saddle, she swung behind—
> Away! for a hot chase down the wind."

"*Bon!*" I cried. M'sieur had a way with him, *un attrait;* what you say? "Charm." He interested everyone.

"But! why cannot you paint it?" I asked.

He flung back a lock of curly hair which always tumbled into his eyes, and frowned.

"I cannot get a model for the girl. 'Lasca,' her name is, and she's an ideal. All love and self-sacrifice for the man she loved, and no 'patient Griselda' business either; plenty of fire and temper."

"*Ma foi!* M'sieur, one would think you could find 'fire and temper' enough in the Latin quarter." I laughed. M'sieur frowned deeper, and shook his head.

"I don't want that kind of fire. It burns out. This woman loved *à la mort.* If I could find her"—he stopped abruptly, as a voice said:

"Perhaps M'sieur would try me?"

Both of us turned quickly, and saw such a tiny little figure. Slight she was, yet somehow not thin—the curves were too beautiful rounded to give any impression of bones. A cloud of hair, real *cendré*, that shade between chestnut and golden which we French admire more than your taffy English locks; dark, straight brows; a pair of grey-blue eyes, fringed with black; a pale skin; full red lips, which drooped at the corner; all this we saw as she stood before us.

"Who are you?" demanded M'sieur.

"Lasca, if M'sieur will," she said demurely.

"Child," he said impatiently, "you can't pose for Lasca. She was dark and wild and fierce almost. No blonde women have any 'go' in them."

"Have they not, M'sieur?" There was a mocking ring in her voice. Her eyes had a strange little expression. "M'sieur knows, *sans doute*," she added, "but perhaps M'sieur would show me the pose he wants."

He pulled down an old Mexican bridle, fastened it to a post, and said:

"The man is mounted. Grab the bridle, put one foot on his toe, and start to swing to the saddle. Jove!" he exclaimed, "that's it exactly."

The child—she seemed scarcely more than that—flung her lithe body into the very position. There was something startling in her *tense pose.* Then: "Will I do, M'sieur?" she asked inquiringly.

"Do? I should think you would," he said. "What's your name?" he asked again.

"Lasca," she answered coolly.

With a shrug he began to paint.

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That commenced it. Every day she came and posed, an old woman waiting for her in the corner like a dragon. Heywood painted fast and steadily.

"I'm afraid she'll disappear in a flash as she came," he said.

Miss Fetherston also came each day for lessons. It seemed to me she taught as well as learnt.

M'sieur often asked her questions, and she gave advice freely. She was tall and dark. I thought her cold and like her own statues. But M'sieur—well, M'sieur had a theory that dark women were worth winning and blondes were cold. A man with a theory has no eyes.

The winter passed, and the new model came and stayed. I painted hard, too, for the Salon came soon, and I was ambitious—then.

One day Miss Fetherston had a red rose in her gown, and M'sieur said 'twas like those in her cheeks. She looked at him in her slow, sleepy way and smiled. I glanced at Lasca, and saw—but I dared not think what I saw, for, in an instant, she too smiled, a strange little smile.

The studio was full of trash. Old armour, draperies, Oriental stuffs, half-finished pictures, sketches, bits of furniture, all were crowded together into a *mélange*.

Miss Fetherston sat in a high-backed chair, resting. Lasca—we knew no other name for her—was curled on a divan, her strange little face in curious contrast to the brilliant hues in which she was draped. I was smoking—that goes without saying. Heywood was talking his theory—that also goes without saying.

"There never was a blonde woman with any 'go' in her," he repeated for the hundredth time.

Miss Fetherston smiled well pleased; Lasca sat up.

"That depends upon where one is to go and with whom," she said.

"Does it, *petite?*" M'sieur always treated the little waif like a child.

"What would you do for the man you loved?" he asked.

"Die," she said laconically.

"That wouldn't do him a great amount of good," said Miss Fetherston.

Lasca's eyes flashed and she bit her lip.

"It might," was all she said.

Then M'sieur spoke.

"Lasca, could you be jealous?" he said.

"Perhaps, M'sieur," she replied. "Why?"

"There's another picture I'd like you to pose for: the Texan said he made her 'jealous for fun,' and in a flash she drew her dagger on him. Can you try it?"

M'sieur always said no model could pose really well unless she felt the meaning of the picture. That was another of his theories.

Lasca sprang up, saying: "I can try, M'sieur," as she draped the Mexican serape round her, tied a brilliant sash about her waist, and thrust a jewelled dagger in her girdle.

As she started to pose, Miss Fetherston came near her.

"You have it not right," she said, as she gave the serape a pull. Just then, M'sieur, too, arranged the drapery. His hand touched hers. A look passed between them.

Lasca saw. Like a flash she drew the dagger, her eyes black with anger, her expression fierce; then she caught herself up quickly.

"Lasca! What acting!" cried M'sieur. "Your pose, your expression was perfect!"

"Thank you, M'sieur," she said in a subdued voice. She was very pale. She caught my eye.

"I do not like women," she said in apology. "I like them not to touch me."

Miss Fetherston shrugged her shoulders and looked amused.

M'sieur painted. Artists may have an eye for colour but they see not other things.

* * * * *

The winter was gone and the spring came. It was beautiful in Paris. Everything seemed new again after all the cold and the dark of the winter.

My Salon picture was accepted and well hung. And M'sieur? His picture of Lasca was a "*Médaille*," and everybody talked of it. Such atmosphere, such masterly handling of a difficult subject! Such a wonderful model, a pose so natural and spirited! These were the favourable criticisms, and M'sieur was the envy of us all.

We were young then. It's a wonderful thing to be young. It means so much: life and light and—Lasca.

One day M'sieur said to Lasca:

"You've made me famous, *petite*."

She smiled radiantly.

"Will you pose again?" he asked.

"When M'sieur wishes," she said, her eyelids down.

"Thank you, *bonne petite*," and he laid his hand carelessly on her hair.

The little proud head drooped.

"For whom else do you pose?" he asked suddenly.

"M'sieur, for no one," she said quickly.

"*Non?*" He was surprised. "Have you plenty of money, child?" abruptly.

"M'sieur!" the one word said a volume of indignation.

"I beg your pardon," he said, and Lasca went swiftly away. I had noticed the old hag who came with her always pocketed the daily fee that Heywood gave to Lasca.

"She doesn't seem like a *grisette*. I wonder who she is?" said M'sieur. It was his first remark about her. She was "only a model" to him. As for me, I was not always old; I could see beyond my palette, and I had no theories.

The next day Miss Fetherston took a holiday. She was gone two weeks. *Dieu!* what a fortnight. Lasca was a different creature. Even M'sieur looked surprised. He never again said "blonde women are tiresome."

Lasca was happy. She expanded before our very eyes, as a rose yields to the sun, till its pure heart lies wide open to the bold fellow's gaze. Ah! Lasca! little pure heart, little Southern rose, where are you now?

One day, it was June, a bright, glorious, sunny June, such as we had when I was young—Junes seem old and cold now. She was especially gay, and her merry sallies kept us both in shouts of laughter. It was better laughter than one hears always near the Quartier Latin. Finally, painting at an end, she flung her tiny form down on the big couch in which she seemed lost. One little foot tapped the floor, such a dainty foot with its high-arched instep. Her hair was pushed loosely back, her sweet eyes were dark, her cheeks flushed and brilliant. She was laughing at M'sieur for some awkward move he had made with his maul-stick, when the door opened.

"A letter for M'sieur," a voice said.

Heywood's face changed. He took the letter, and opening it, read eagerly.

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Lasca watched him, and I—I watched Lasca. Her face changed, too. As the sunset glow passes from the sky when night comes, all the pretty colour faded from her cheeks. Then M'sieur spoke like a big schoolboy planning a holiday. These English are *canaille*, I think.

"No more painting to-day! Old man, congratulate me. Lasca, I must tell you something. Miss Fetherston has promised to marry me. She is coming back to-morrow."

I glanced at Lasca. She was white to the lips, but struggling bravely for self-command. I spoke hastily.

"I congratulate you, *vraiment!* M'sieur, and Mademoiselle as well," talking on as best I could.

Then Lasca spoke: "And, M'sieur, I wish you joy—and Mademoiselle." There was a catch in her voice but she coughed and hid it. "M'sieur will not need me to-day? *Au revoir*," and she glided out of the room.

The next day she came not. Miss Fetherston was there, calm, stately and looking beautiful. She took as a matter of course M'sieur's homage which, like all Englishmen when in love, he lavished freely.

Les Américaines are strange women!

Again, the next day Lasca came not. M'sieur chafed. He wished to paint. Love is sweet but Art is Master. The third day she came, so white, so fragile, the cruel, black shadows under the great grey eyes.

"M'sieur will pardon, I was ill," she said deprecatingly to Heywood's somewhat surly greeting. An artist when he is crossed is truly a spoiled child. Lasca posed again and Mademoiselle Fetherston criticised rather freely.

"You have not wished me joy yet," she said to Lasca one day.

Lasca's eyes flashed peculiarly.

"I wished it to M'sieur," she said; "if you love him you prefer he should have it."

"You are a strange child," said Mademoiselle.

Two weeks more, and then came the wedding. The bride and groom were to go to Normandy for a month's holiday.

"After that, I want you to pose again, Lasca," said M'sieur, the day before the wedding.

"Yes, M'sieur?" Lasca's voice had the pretty inflection of a question.

"Yes, *petite*," he said, "you're the best model I ever had. Good-bye," and he held out his hand.

She raised her poor little white face, and looked at him once, a long, long look.

"Good-bye," she said, and stooping swiftly she kissed his hand—once—twice—thrice—then, skimming like a bird on the wing, was gone from the room.

M'sieur rubbed his hand on his velvet jacket and looked foolish.

"Jove! What a tempest," he said.

"Blonde women have no 'go,'" I said drily.

The next day was the wedding. At Notre Dame the Mass was, and I went. The church was crowded, though few noticed the quiet ceremony. M'sieur and Miss Fetherston were too taken up with themselves to see the wee white face I saw in the crowd.

The Mass was over, and M'sieur and his bride turned to leave the church.

What was that noise? A roar as if from wild beasts, and in an instant all was confusion.

"Socialists," was the cry. "Vallinski and his Twelve!" Women screamed and fainted. Men fought their way to the door. Blows resounded. Oaths were heard.

I looked for Lasca, and caught a glimpse of her close to M'sieur. I pushed to his tall form as he struggled to the great door. He was supporting his wife, and was pale with anger, she with fright.

"Down with priests and their worshippers!" cried the Socialists. One remembered the Commune, and the twenty-second of May.

Then came the police, and the fight became fiercer. I saw Heywood strike a man a heavy blow, exclaiming: "Keep off the lady, can't you?"

The wretch uttered a frightful oath, and cried: "*Sacré bleu!* I can, but I will not!"

An instant, there was a gleam of steel, a flash, a woman's fearful shriek of agony, and I could see no more. I forced my way to them and reached M'sieur just as he stepped through the portico. He was carrying something in his arms. His wife was hurt, then? He kneeled in the porch supporting on his knees—*Mon Dieu!*—Lasca!

The tumult was stilled, and the police had control. Madame Heywood knelt beside her husband. Lasca, cold and still, lay in his arms.

"Is she dead?" I asked faintly.

She opened her eyes and saw nothing but the face bending over her. She smiled a smile of perfect bliss.

"How did it happen?" I whispered.

In choked tones, Madame Heywood answered: "A man drew his dagger and tried to kill me. She flung herself between. He stabbed her."

Then Lasca spoke feebly, for the blood came in great gushes from the wound in her breast.

"I saved her for you," she gasped. "I told you I could die for *him!* I always loved you. Will you kiss me just once?"

M'sieur bent his head and pressed his lips to hers, Lasca raised a tiny white hand and patted his cheek feebly.

"It is very sweet—to—die—for—you," she murmured, and, with that perfect smile upon her lips, she died.

* * * * *

The journal next day had a small notice.

"A number of Socialists, headed by Vallinski, a Pole, broke into the church of Notre Dame yesterday and came to blows with the worshippers. Doubiuska Vallinski, the young daughter of the ring-leader, was fatally stabbed."

MARY F. M. NIXON.

Key to Jumbled Story.—No. 19. *See Page 679.*

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Or, THE ROMANCE OF A LOST CONTINENT.

By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BATTLE OF THE SHIPS.

ON the even following the morn when the fleet was ready to set sail—for I deferred the start until next day, that we might have less distance to traverse and so be fresher to meet the oncoming foe—I lingered in that fair garden long after the rosy sunset had died away, listlessly pacing amongst its bowers and tree-arched avenues, hoping against hope that Briseis would meet me there before I went away to do battle for her and her crown. The moon rose, though obscured at intervals by light, drifting clouds, and her pale beams cast weird, fantastic shadows on the mossy slopes and pebbly paths which I perambulated aimlessly. A cooling zephyr, scent-laden, came rustling through the drooping leaves of the tall trees, playing on my brow with the most delicious chilliness, and sighing away amid the shrubs and flowers on its course to the city with a soft, subdued, and soothing monody. Calmed somewhat by its pleasing gentleness I turned my steps towards the rustic seat in the old familiar grove, and sat there, lulled by the stilly sounds into a thoughtful reverie.

Not long had I sat there, when a different noise struck on my ear, and my heart leaped in expectation as I peered down that ghostly arcade of bending boughs and shifting shadows, seeing presently a form in white stepping softly on the darkened path. It came nearer, first haltingly, as though afraid, and then, when I sprang forward into the light of a lunar ray, more quickly and confidentially. It was Briseis, my Queen, my love! With fevered haste I stretched out my arms to take her to my embrace, but gently, yet firmly, she motioned me aside, and bidding me sit where she could see my face, took seat in a shadow, though not an arm's length from me. Fearing, I was silent, nonplussed by her sudden coldness, and she was the first to break the stillness with her silvery speech.

"I am here, Arnon, as I hinted to thee in the palace, wishing to see thee before thou goest away to do battle for me."

"Now thou has come, I am indeed repaid, my Queen, for the hours of watching and waiting that I have done for thee," I said, striving once more to seize her hands.

"It may not be, Arnon," said she, repulsing me, still with gentleness; "it may not be until thou hast explained to me some things that I will ask."

"Ask on," I answered, my self-assurance oozing fast.

"Thou wilt know what I desire thee to tell," said the Queen, "when I say that many rumours have reached me that thou art one and the same with that adventurer who named himself Macis, who lived at the palace of the Princess of Aidè, the wanton Listra, and was her paramour for more than a year."

"Who has set this tale afloat?" I asked angrily, immediately suspecting my two comrades, and forgetting how easily it might have reached Kronos otherwise.

"Nay, think not to deny it, Arnon; 'tis no lying report, but a true story, for there are those in the city now who lived at Thinæ when thou wast under the syren's spell, who came here when I sent to raise an army in that province. Seeing thee here, these nobles and soldiers have not scrupled to noise abroad thy former doings, and, also, thy followers have been recognised."

I groaned aloud, seeing that the black truth was out and there was now no escape from it.

"Groan not yet, Arnon," went on Briseis, "I have more to say. I might forgive thee even such a great apostacy as this, knowing the deepness of Listra's wiles and the power of her wicked charms, and also that it is said she was thy willing leman, even beseeching thee to love her, but she is not the only fair one thou hast had since I bade thee farewell so long ago. Who was she who was 'so dear to thee,' who sailed with thee on the eastern seas, now nigh three years agone?"

"What! knowest of Vesta, too?"

"I knew not her name, but only of her," continued my interrogator, with pain in her voice now, "through a troublesome pirate called Thaska, who was captured by a warship soon after he had spoken your vessel. They brought him to me—for, seeking news of thee, I questioned every sea-robber who fell into my sailors' clutches—and he told how he had chased in vain a full-rigged pleasure ship far out on the eastern waters, and that from her deck thou defied him to a trial of speed, fearing to give him battle because of one on board 'who was dear to thee.' Say, was she a wanton, like Listra?"

"Far from it," I said. "One more like thy own pure self than that; one who now sleeps in the Shadows beyond, at peace. But tell me, what didst do with Thaska?"

"I let him go again, because he brought me tidings that thou wert still living," said Briseis, beginning, I thought, to relent. "And now, my Arnon, tell me, as briefly as may be, the story of thy wanderings, hiding nothing for fear or shame."

So I told her how the world had used me in those fourteen years; how I came nigh to death in the trackless Nubian forests; how I fared in the Land of Khem, saving Vesta from the leopard, seeing the shape of Isis, discovering the plot against the life of King Menophres and coming into possession of my famous sword, and, through thinking my listener false, through Sothi's words, I had married Vesta and lived in peace for twice five years and then fled from the land through Itaska's jealousy; how we were wrecked in the *Seamew* and how Vesta perished of thirst on the open sea, leaving me alone to be cast up by the fickle waves near the secret treasure-hoard. And as I talked, growing grave or gay as memory responded to my call,

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Briseis drew nearer to me, till our hands met, just as they had done when we twain nestled there before—it seemed but yesterday—and ever she kept her gaze upon my face with breathless interest. When I told of Vesta's death, I felt her hand clasp mine in a shudder of sorrow and sympathy, and the solitary ray of moonlight that now shone upon us both showed glistening tear-drops trembling in her swimming eyes.

"Pray tell me further, Arnon," she said, "for I forgive thee fully so far. Had been more than mortal to have done otherwise in a far and foreign land."

Then I went on to relate my meeting with one-eared Vichri and the lying tale he told me, showing how, through believing it, I had fallen an easy prey to the captivating graces of unscrupulous Listra. "Though now," I said, "that I have been fooled, I hate her more than my worst foe."

"Then I must forgive thee all, my weak-heart, it seems to me," said the Queen, "for surely thou hadst good cause for all thy misdeeds, and ill deserve that I turn cold at last! Yet 'tis hard to know thee sullied by an impure love, and 'tis hard to quench the fire of jealousy that hath burned within me since these things came to my knowledge."

"And 'twas hard for me to think thee false," I said, "to toss in sleeplessness at nights, and rack my brain for answer to the puzzle in the day, and ever to carry the load of that thought of pain with me, in good luck or ill. 'Twas hard indeed; but amply I am repaid now that the cloud is lifted.

"But tell me," I continued, "how Sothi came to know my real character, and so impose that dreadful tale on me?"

"Would that I had learned the truth before my cousin—base ingratiate—could have used the King as his instrument, or Sothi could have put his project into execution," said Briseis. "Every hand but mine was against thee, then, who art now so honoured and favoured."

"'Tis wealth and fame that alone are honoured," I said bitterly, "in the world's eyes. But did this one-eared cousin lie to me in that particular also? Was't he who helped me into exile?"

"'Twas he, indeed," murmured the Queen; "but I will tell thee the foul story as I discovered it some years ago. My cousin Vichri came home from Ulmeca when you had gone on your treasure-hunt some weeks, and knowing that I should most likely be chosen to ascend the throne at the death of the old King, who was without issue, offered wedlock to me—though it may be that he loved me for myself as far as he can love anything. I need not give my answer to thee, Arnon. Then, raging inwardly, and outwardly morose, he came by chance into the society of Sothi, whom you had defeated so pitilessly at his favourite art of swordplay, and unknown to me they went to the King, obtaining his seal for thy outlawry. How the vanquished swordsman brought that about thou knowest, but not how they gained news of thy name. Dost remember that twice as we sat here and our love was told, there was a gentle rustling sound behind the shrubs?"

Like a sudden flash of light through the mist of a murky day, the remembrance of that sound came back to me. I had not heeded it then.

"Yes, I recall it well, now thou hast spoken, my Queen," I answered moodily, looking into the darkness.

"It was a slave, Arnon, a black slave whom I had punished the day before for eavesdropping, and who thus revenged himself on me by dogging my steps and overhearing our secret. This he cherished in his evil heart till Vichri came, when, seeing his chagrin and guessing the reason, he told the news to him. This, together with the knowledge that you dared to love me, and was more fortunate than himself, was the last provocation that Vichri needed. Being my cousin I could not punish him openly when I was made queen, nor Sothi, for reasons I have said, and also, until the death of this slave, who confessed his guilt to me at the bidding of the priest of Life, I did not know the whole story."

"And what of that slave?" I asked.

"I let him die in peace," said Briseis, ever merciful, "seeing that the spirits will so soon pass their verdict upon him. But when Vichri re-urged his suit when I was queen, I told him what I knew, sending him from my presence with scorn and sharp-stinging words, bidding him not to show his face again in Kronos. From that moment he has hated me, and for that reason has now gone to

Our lips met in the kiss that sealed the sacred compact.

Ulmeca, there to assist the recreant Quitzaal, and doubtless this will explain why Sothi gave up Miropis to the enemy. And as the last drop in the cupful of his wickedness, Vichri must tell thee lying tales of me and send thee to the arms of a wanton, one whose charms were not strange to him, and only discarded because the novelty had worn off his passion."

"By Neith, Mant, and Nepthys!" I cried in Egyptian, the hot blood rushing to my face with fiery indignation, "by all the evil spirits of Amenti and the Shadow-Land" (relapsing into Atlantian again), "I knew not that till now. Gods and Spirits! but 'tis more than a man may bear! Have pity on me, Briseis, who art so pure and far above me that I scarce dare touch thee with these polluted hands!"

"When have I not had pity on thee; when not in all these years yearned to look on thee and tell thee that through all I have been true?" breathed Briseis, all gentleness and compassion now, from her sweet heart outwards. "Say that, through all, my Arnon, thou, too, hast thought of me."

"Ever, my pure love," I replied, "saving when the thought that thou wert lost to me for ever dimmed my reason and unhinged my mind. Saving then I have been true to thee, and from now will be so ever, cherishing and

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loving thee, and whether thou will it or no, watching over thee through joy or sorrow, to life's far end."

"Dearest, most deserving of men!" cried Briseis, yielding herself to my long-delayed and passionate embrace with a sigh of content, "I cannot deny thee longer, who hast waited such a weary time for our re-union. I cannot resist thee, steel my heart against thee as I may. Our souls were only meant each for the other, so take me, Arnon my love, both body and spirit, to be thy own from now henceforth!"

"My own sweet one!" I murmured gently, almost overcome by the sudden weight of gladness and the thrill of love's supremest joy. And when our lips met in the kiss that sealed the sacred compact, the kiss so long deferred, so sweetly given by my lovely dear whose form was Beauty's self, all count of time and sense of space fled from me, the darkness and the straggling moonlight was as though it were not. We were no longer sovereign and subject, but made equal by love's all-levelling forgetfulness, and in the overpowering blissfulness of that enraptured moment, one thought, one feeling alone, was tangible within my mind, and that was—Briseis, my love, my queen.

Presently, when the first flush of our joy was past, and we were able to talk, as rational beings, of other things, Briseis asked if I sailed on the morrow.

"Yes," I said, "unless, dear heart, you desire it otherwise."

"Nay, my Iron-fingers—as once before I called thee—I desire that you go as soon as can be, that you be the sooner back," said she, "for it is not seemly for a queen to wed a mere adventurer, who is known to be fresh from the arms of a careless woman; whereas, if you come back to Kronos as a great and victorious general, the saviour of your country, and wealthy, too, it will seem a fit and proper thing. For myself, thou knowest I care not for these quibbles, but a queen is not as other women."

"Art grave beyond thy years, my love," I answered; "but your advice is sound, and it shall be as you say. I will not return till every foe to Atlantis has fought his last."

"And then, my Arnon," said Briseis, "come to me and claim me for thy own, and thou shalt be my lord and King."

A little longer we stayed in that leafy avenue, and then, at the dictates of prudence, parted for the night, though I remained awhile, watching the flutter of her white robe adown the flower-bordered path, and the gleams of light upon her snowy coif, as far as my gaze could follow. Then I sought my couch to snatch an hour of needed sleep before the morrow's sun should rise and the morrow's task be entered on.

* * * * *

When the first streaks of red appeared in the east, I was afoot, and, rousing my comrades, proceeded to the bay, and soon stood on the deck of the doughty *Ravager*, which, with new-painted hull, taut sails, and fresh timbers where the old planks had rotted, warped out bravely to the middle of the harbour, and carried me on a visit of inspection round the huge fleet, now waking into active life. Canvas was unfurled, spars swung out, helms unbraced, and all was ready, when, at the mast of our low-hulled craft, now under her full spread of snow-white wings, I ran up the signal to weigh anchors and stand out to sea, tacking to the westward near the shore in two divisions.

By now the sun had fairly risen, and the great quays and wharves of Kronos were alive with the cheering populace, calling adieu to their friends on board and invoking the help of the Spirits for our task; and as the vast fleet swept out of the bay, rounding the beacon point, I saw the light and graceful cariole of the Queen, drawn by a pair of jet black steeds, dash round the harbour curve and out upon the promontory rock that guards the entrance, and of which all the ships, excepting my own, were by this time clear. As the *Ravager*, keeping in the rear to mark the stragglers, if any, shot grandly past the point, her prow cutting through the surf with a hissing music that was sweet in my ears, the royal cariole drew up at the very verge of the stone sea-wall, and Briseis herself, standing proudly erect in the light conveyance, waved her hand to me over the rapidly widening gulf of sea and spray.

I spun "Sunderer" high in the air in answering signal, catching it by the hilt as it fell, the newly-ground and polished blade gleaming white in the sun-rays, and at the sight of their lovely Queen a mighty cheer arose from that giant armament in one vast roaring wave of sound. Then, under the rising gale, we drew away, and presently all objects near the city were indistinguishable from our decks.

Now, giving the *Ravager* her full press of canvas, I flew forward, heading the labouring squadrons in splendid style, and pursued my way about a cable's length in front of the foremost line, in keen look-out for the expected foe.

Till evening the sea ahead was unbroken by a single sail, and all through the day we coasted along the shore with a favouring breeze, having full view, as we went, of the little fishing hamlets and littoral towns, half hidden in the dense copses of cedar, sycamore, olive, myrtle, and acacia trees, which, occurring in pleasing alternation, extended their territory into the ocean, whose salt waves lapped their outmost trunks with ominous familiarity. So close sometimes we sailed to the shore that we caught glimpses of the women water-carriers of the villages, bearing the earthen jars upon their heads with native grace, and walking with that upright carriage that their humble lot alone can give, their bare arms swinging as they went. Later on we sheered off into deeper water for safety as the darkness drew on, and the land then sunk to a low black ridge to northward.

I despaired of meeting the enemy that day, and was thinking, as I watched the red ball of the sun sinking into the west, and throwing his beams in a dazzling path of sparkling gold from the horizon to the *Ravager's* prow, that I would hoist the signal to drop anchors for the night, when a joyful shout rang out from the mast-tops of a dozen vessels: "The fleet in sight! Sails low down on the westward bow!" Straining my eyes I waited, and presently a black dot and then another, and then a score in quick succession, passed before the half-hidden disc of the sun flaring fiery as he hovered 'twixt day and night, and then as we swept on, scores upon scores of other sails and spars, and lastly hulls, crowding together and tacking towards us, coming up against us out of the portals of the sunset, six hundred strong.

"Put on full sail and stir up the rowers to their hardest," I cried, "and signal to grapple with the foe without delay!"

"But 'tis eve, and the sun has set now!" gasped Orlanis, the mate; "wilt not put off the action till dawn?"

"Who is captain here?" I asked shortly. "We shall attack them *now!* 'Twill be a moonlight night, and before long there will be plenty of lamps in yonder fleet. Also, the wind is now for us and against them. Forward! I command!"

Orlanis, obeying, said no more, and deploying into two great squadrons, stretching crescent shape, with the horns of the curve towards the foe, we stood onward, the *Ravager* leading by a cable's length. It was a grand spectacle, as we drew nearer, was that hostile fleet, coming on through the deepening twilight in a long, unbroken line athwart our course, the sails bellying as the whole mighty armament tacked to and fro to make headway, the thousands of oars beating the water to the song of the rowers with rhythmic strokes, the spray curling from the pointed prows in showers of foam, the decks crowded with warriors already calling their defiance, and behind the lines of warships, the long, low pirate craft creeping on with their lateen sails. Quite forty of these vessels, which gave me more concern than a hundred of the other ships, now hove into view, the

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notes of the Ina-Ana floating to us faintly over the churned up waves.

My instructions to my fleet were short and simple, though strange to every seaman in it. I ordered that, contrary to our usual naval tactics, our ships were each to run alongside and board the first foe they met—never approaching more than one at once—and that the boarding parties were to make no effort to capture the hostile vessel, as was customary, but only to remain on her deck long enough to set fire to her timbers or to bore leak-holes in her bows beneath the water-line. For these purposes I had placed on every ship a number of men, some armed with huge earthen jars of highly inflammable oil, and others with sharp piercing-tools, and when their task was successfully accomplished the vessel was to draw off the doomed craft and proceed to serve another in like manner.

I had experienced some difficulty in inculcating and enforcing these injunctions, but had at length succeeded, by dint of making strong use of the queen's authority. Now, when I flew the signal for instant action, also for a squadron of fifty vessels to stay in the rear as a reserve, I saw with satisfaction these new tactics put into operation with unqualified success, to the utter astonishment and consternation of the rebel captains.

The wind was blowing from the east still, and thus assisted, we soon bore down upon them, and our first lines met in the battle-shock. Then there was crashing and bumping of prows against bows, rattling of anchor chains, and snapping of grapnels as they caught in the enemy's sides; clashing of weapons, shouts of defiance, orders loudly thundered above the din, cries of rage and pain from the wounded and dying, and yells of amaze from the foes as the ships parted again by scores, and out of the darkness that had now fallen leapt a hundred tongues of flame from a hundred burning ships, and fifty shouts of despair from as many vessels swiftly sinking into the black waters. Then the battle-line closed again, and again my ships drew back, and again uprose from a hundred rebel hulls a hundred sheets of wreathing, roaring fire, twisting the timbers and flaring up the masts, and reducing the sails and cords to blackened shreds and ashen strands, and causing the rowers to let fall their oars, rushing screaming on deck, and such of them and the crew who could not get away in the boats to leap into the sea.

Again and again my proud and curving line of war-ships dashed upon the hopelessly confused and panic-stricken foe, but not so recklessly now, nor so effectively, for the hundreds of burning and sinking ships drifting hither and thither, and ever bearing down amongst the rebel squadrons, were dangerous neighbours to sail with, and while driving Vichri's array westward before their red advance, kept us from following too closely in their wake. Well was it for us, indeed, that the wind still kept at our backs, and that the unexpected darkness of the night added to the terrors of the scene.

Fearful was the sight that these hundreds of blazing hulks presented to us, glaring vividly against the black canopy of sea and cloud-covered sky, horrible were the cries of despair, the yells and the cursings, that rose on all sides, even deadening the roaring of the flames, the snapping and crackling of the scorched wet planks, and the gurgling sound of the great ships sinking into the red-gleaming water, sucked down in a vortex of swirling foam.

All night the fight raged, ever drifting to the west and south, and woe to every straggler in the enemy's fleet who got entangled in that long line of burning craft, or coming scatheless through, fell in with our foremost ships. No mercy, no quarter was asked or given in that struggle, and when day broke we saw that the proud array that had met us so gaily and confidently in the sunset glow, was now but a sorry collection of battered argosies, running still to escape the remaining fire-ships; an armament barely numbering half its former strength, while my fleet was still sweeping on in orderly pursuit, in the same curving line, with the *Ravager* still ahead, and the fifty reserve ships still in the rear.

Yet the fight, I well knew, was not yet over. In the strengthening light the fire-ships looked less fearsome and were easily avoided; moreover, the rebels knew our tactics now, and would be on their guard, and retaliate in like manner also. The forty pirate vessels had so far taken no part in the struggle and were fast coming to the front, quite fresh. Still I sent my curving array at them again, and in the *Ravager* prepared to take a more active part in the conflict. Standing up in the prow, behind the hideous tiger-head that yawned menacingly at all who neared us, with Valdo and Atris close to my side, I waited, sword in hand, for the onset of the foremost pirate ship. Whose it was I could not tell, for like the other vessels, she flew the rebel flag alone; the red cross, outlined with white, upon a field of blue, the same that I had seen on the warship of the Prince of Aidè, when he landed on that desolate northern shore of his province.

As the long, evil-looking craft, iron-beaked like my own, drew nearer, a man stood up in the prow and hailed us. I knew him well. So had he stood and roared his challenge when I fled before him in the *Seamew*. 'Twas Strong-arm Thaska, and no other!

"Ha! traitor and braggart!" I cried in answer, "I am come, thou see'st, to take up thy challenge, and on the *Ravager's* deck to pay you with usury for treachery to your Queen!"

"Art bold now, courtier, slave, and cherisher of fair ones," roared Thaska back again; "but think not I shall run from thee as you turned tail last time we met! Come hither with thy ship, Arnon, that I may pick a water-hole in her side!"

"First see to your own ungainly craft," I answered, my temper rising at his chaffering. "Orlanis, there, shorten sail and let us stove his starboard bows into his larboard! Valdo, be ready to board with me; and, Atris, guard the stern from yonder creeping coward," for another pirate was beating up to windward with design to take us at a disadvantage.

Swiftly, then, the old *Ravager*, true to her guiding hand, slewed round and sheered off, just as the keen iron ram of Thaska's ship tore past our bow, missing our quickly-indrawn oars by an arrow's length, and swiftly too, as he raged helplessly past, our sharp beak was turned against his bows and with a mighty shock and a rending crash tore its rough way through planking and stanchions, and rib-rafters, making both ships rock on the shaky sea as though smitten with a palsy.

Then, as we steadily strove in vain to back out, hearing the inrush of water into the leak, and before all my crew had recovered from the knock-down blow, Thaska and his men had leapt on board in revengeful rage, led by the bulky form of Strong-Arm himself, and driven us, with their sudden charge, to the stern-end of our deck, some of their latter boarders making the ships fast together with grapnels and cables. Now, if we could not overpower our foes and cut those fastenings before the doomed vessel sank, dragging ours with it, all was lost, and fiercely we turned on our opponents, no less frenzied than themselves, and commenced to cut our way back through the compact body of the pirate crew. Then it was that my "Sunderer" stood me in good stead, and I thanked Mitres in my heart a score of times that day for having given it to me in the banquet-hall of King Menophres' palace at Thebes. Clearing a way in front with its shining blade, and followed hard by Valdo, calm and practical even in that wild turmoil, I pressed forward, the keen razor-edge of the white-flashing sword smiting invincibly through helm and breast-plate and tunic, snapping spears and shivering opposing blades, nay, even piercing clean through more than one rough pirate who encountered me in my ravaging career.

In the waist of the ship I met Thaska sword to sword, and men stood off to give us room and watch us strive like

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giants in our wrath. First he broke my defence, and drew a line of red across my cheek, then I seized a chance of bursting through his guard, and traced a scar of fire down his sword arm from shoulder to wrist, and next, showering blows upon me in his pain and madness so thickly that I was beaten back, he fleshed his blade in my right thigh. But ere he could withdraw it to defend himself from my next stroke, "Sunderer" had leapt up and buried itself in his side, and over he rolled in the death

He rolled in the death agony.

agony. A mighty shout rose from my men at this, and I had scarce time to pull the rankling weapon from my leg and cast it away, when, with a rush and a wild cheer, my crew swept the pirates before them over our prow and their gangway on to their own vessel. With them I was carried, striking at and severing two of the fastening cables as I went; then back we surged, for the ship were getting low in the water now, and heedless of my pain and the showers of missiles that the foe poured around me, I sprang down upon our ram and hacked fiercely at the chains that still bound the vessels together. Would "Sunderer's" edge and temper stand the strain put on it? I feared, but the good steel blade, true to its reputation, answered nobly to my call upon its power, and clove the iron links and twisted bars of bronze as neatly as a pliant elder sapling.

One is cut—now another—and now, though my arm begins to fail and an ugly dent appears in the great sword's edge, the third is broken, the ships part, and Thaska's vessel sinks in a whirling eddy, while the tough old *Ravager*, under the frantic impulse of her oars, sheers off in triumph, rasping roughly as she does so against the side of another pirate craft.

But Atris is true to his post, and watchful; and flushed with success my men are aboard the new enemy in the passing of a thought, and before ever I have time to join them, have fired her, have scrambled back again, and left her to her fate. Into the thick of the fight we dash again, signalling the fifty reserve vessels to advance to the front, and with their help the battle-tide turns for good, and the scattered rebel squadrons, beaten, veer round and fly before us to the westward with all the speed that sails and oars can give them.

All through the rest of that day we pursued them doggedly, hanging on their rear and picking off all loiterers in that mad race, and all through the running fight, enabled so to do by the *Ravager's* superior swiftness, I searched for the ship which Sothi or Vichri, or both, might be aboard; but 'twas not fated that I should find them there, and after a weary chase we gave up the pursuit at nightfall, the seventy and odd vessels that alone remained of the rebel fleet of six hundred sail making good their escape under cover of the darkness. Till dawn we rode at anchor, then turned our prows to the eastward and to home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

To the Western Land.

It was said of old by the priests of the Spirit of Life, that "success re-gilds a villain's character and maketh an ignorant fool sought after by many wiser men," and surely it is a true saying, for whatever sins and follies I, Arnon, had committed, they were all forgotten in the wild and tumultuous acclamations of praise and admiration that rose from a hundred thousand throats as, with two hundred battered and weakly-manned ships, I entered the wide-curving bay of the stately city, flying the flag of conquest.

My deeds, the success of my new naval tactics, and the heroism of the *Ravager's* crew, were in all mouths that day, and many days after, and it was with renewed enthusiasm that the soldiery, sailors, and populace heard that Marenso and myself were made the queen's chief ministers and generals over both land and sea forces, equal in rank and power. As for Valdo and Atris, they desired nothing better than to be known as my first and ablest lieutenants, and in such position came in for full share of the honour and glory of the victory.

Soon after my return the Sleeper came back from Aidè with his triumphant army, receiving a welcome scarcely less enraptured than my own, reporting that the rebels who had not thrown down their arms had been driven from shelter to shelter, and at last compelled to take flight across the sea, a dispirited remnant in a solitary ship, and that now not an enemy remained under arms throughout the length and breadth of Atlantis.

Marenso I found greatly changed. He had aged slightly, had worn off the strangeness of his feelings, and proved a stout-hearted warrior, fond of everything that smacked of conflict, eschewing women as rankest poison—suiting Valdo in that!—and much addicted, when not on the battlefield, to the excellent fishing and poor hunting that our country afforded. Fast friends grew he and I in the years of life that remained to him, who had wasted so many in a dreamless sleep!

I did not allow this martial ardour and popular applause to subside before I re-embarked my crews, and also a force of fifty thousand men, on board the two hundred vessels, and set forth for Ulmeca, to stamp out the revolt in its last hold. Nubia was lost by vacillation, divided councils, and apathy, when King Dulo sat on the throne, and I determined that Ulmeca should not be lost for like reasons if Marenso and I could avert such a disaster. Alas! Strong is human will, and high are human hopes, but frail is human power and foresight, and vain is human effort when the fiat of Fate has gone forth and the doom is decided. So have I always found it through my life.

Before the start I sought speech with Briseis alone, but she would grant me only a short time, saying that I had not yet fulfilled my vow of leaving no foes alive within her dominions.

"For 'tis a safe seat beside me on the silver throne that I would give thee," she said.

"Safe or unsafe," I answered, "'tis all as one to me, who would love nothing better than to live fighting your battles."

"To live so, indeed," said she softly, "but not all who go to the fight come back living, and thou mightest well be one of those, through no desire of thine, my Arnon, my Iron-fingers."

"That is true," I musingly returned, "though till I have

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been to the Sacred Grotto a third time, I fear not death, for so Unim has told me—and so I go, as you wish, my queen, the idol of my heart."

"Yes, go, Arnon, and may the spirits prosper thee and waft thee safely over the seas and back again to these arms that have waited thee so long and wearily; and should need be, give over Ulmeca to her native tribes, the fierce Red Barbarians, when thou hast conquered the rebels, sooner than keep a province ever in revolt."

"That advice, my queen, I shall only act upon if forced and as a last resort, but conquer Quitzaal I shall, and bring him, a prisoner, to your feet. And now, for the fleet is waiting my presence, I will say farewell."

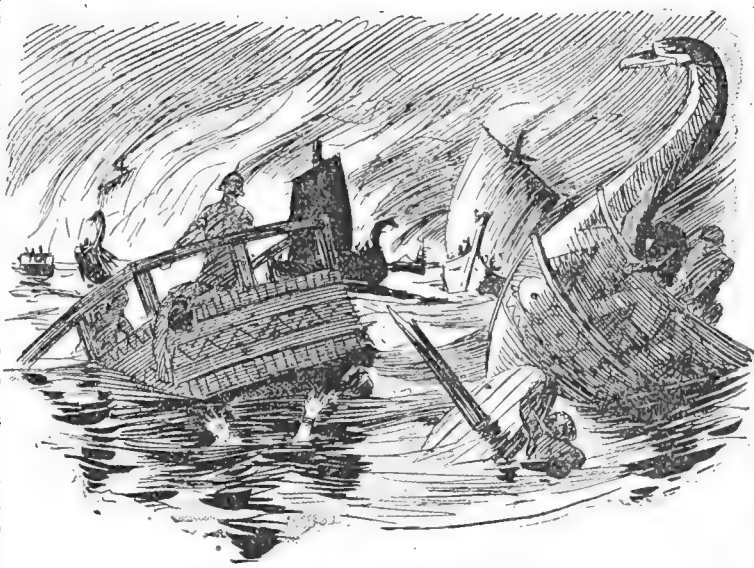
With a long impassioned kiss we parted then, she to her own especial apartment, sacred to herself and her maid Izitla; I to the harbour and the *Ravager's* deck once more, her sweet words ringing musically in my ears as I went: "Go, Arnon, and may the Spirits prosper thee and waft thee safely over the seas and back again to the arms that have waited thee so long and wearily." Loved words, full of heart's-ease for me in the many dreary months that followed.

I need not tell of our voyage, as the ocean gave us no trouble, and we met none of the foe's ships till we sighted the shore of that lovely western land just where the coast-line trends to the south-west in that vast island-studded, isle-starred inlet, round whose lengthy shores sweeps the wide warm current of the Summer River,* carrying its welcome heat to the ice-bound regions of the north.

There, as our fleet was crossing the yellow-weeded stream, we caught first glimpse of the rebel ships, some eighty of them, moored close inshore, and crowded from gangway to rigging with soldiers. Seeing us, they made no effort to warp out, but waited us as they were, supported, we could see, by a land force little inferior to our own.

"Not one of these vessels must escape," I said to my comrades of the *Ravager*; "every wooden ship of them must be burnt, sunk, or captured before ever we land a man. Do you, Atris, go aboard the *Wave-cutter*, take nineteen other craft, and creep down on them, shore-coasting fashion, from the north. You, Valdo, take the *Ocean Wolf* and do likewise from the south; you, Marenso, take forty of the heaviest-laden ships to the rear, and hold aloof till I show the red signal at my mast; and I, with the remaining vessels, will pounce upon these rebels without delay all along their line. What must be done must be done quickly ere they change their minds."

The three leaders sprang into boats and off to their duties at once, and without waiting for them I bore down with my hundred keels upon the expectant foe. This time, however, the fight was more equal, for their ships were crowded with soldiers, and over gangway planks sloping from their decks to the shore they poured fresh men as fast as we hewed them down in front. In the end we must perforce give back, one ship only being fired, and that cut loose and floating out with the ebbing tide, caused us more trouble than a little to give it free sea-room. Then I thought a moment, watching the defiant craft rising and falling slowly on the ground swell, and as I watched a brilliant idea took me. The *Ravager* was the only ship in either fleet now with a sharp iron ram—why not crush these stubborn foes with it in rotation as they tossed thus at my mercy? Atris and Valdo, with their two divisions, were now posted on either flank, behind me was Marenso and his forty sail, as well as the first line. There was no escape for Quitzaal's ships.



There was no escape for Quitzaal's ships.

"Furl sails and out oars!" I cried, and then as that was done: "Orlanis, go below, and make the arms of those rowers ache with pulling harder than they ever pulled before. I take the rudder, and stand clear, all of you, while I pick some peep-holes in these wooden walls! Stand clear! Easy there! Away!" and on shot the *Ravager* shoreward like an arrow from a bow, almost lifted out of the water by the sudden strong impetus of the hundred and fifty oars, and heading straight towards the flagship of the enemy's fleet. I held the rudder rigid when I got her pointed true, and presently, with a thunderous shock and a rasping, tearing, splintering roar, the iron beak cut its way into the side of the stricken, hopelessly injured vessel.

"Back all!" I cried soon as I saw the iron enter. "Back all, and archers and slingers forward!"

The oars eased, wavered a moment, and then seaward we shot again, leaving our enemy a crippled wreck. A score of her crew had leapt on board, but these we soon cut down, and as swiftly as could be I brought the *Ravager* to a standstill and charged at the neighbouring vessel without giving time for any precautionary measures on the rebels' part. Again we held our breath as the good ship gathered way, rushing headlong on her opponent, and again, successfully, we drew back, leaving a shattered hulk behind. A round dozen ships I destroyed in this fashion, and then the rest, disinclined to court a similar fate by their inactivity, cut cables and came out to meet us.

Then we closed on them from all sides, the good old *Ravager* ramming not a few even in motion, and the end of it was that not one of those eighty vessels, the sole remnant of Quitzaal's maritime power, escaped our hands. Those we did not burn we sank, those we did not burn or sink we captured, and having thus removed all hindrance to our movements, we steered a southerly course for a few days, anchoring near a sheltered reach of coast between two sloping, forest-clad hills, on the verge of a fertile country. Here, unmolested, I disembarked my fifty thousand men at arms, with food and war stores, and began my march across this new, strange land.

For awhile we encountered no opposition, either from the

*The Gulf Stream, doubtless, where it emerges from the Gulf of Mexico.

rebels or the Red Barbarians, which made me uneasy rather than glad, remembering the tactics of Ethiop in the wilds of Nubia, and it was with growing concern that I saw how the foes we ought to have met vanished before us into the inmost inland depths of the thick forest. Deserted barbarian villages we found in plenty as we went, and once the crumbling ruins of an Atlantian town of considerable size, but of friend or foe, whether white or copper-coloured, not a glimpse, not a sign.

I was troubled more than I cared to show to the soldiers, and so was Marenso, who, saying that in his day our sailors had not discovered this western land, lamented that their keels had ever touched its shores.

"When I fell asleep," said he, "Atlantis was united, and strong in her insular security, and peace reigned supreme in all her provinces. With the growth of foreign colonies has come discord, rebellion, and war, when of all things war is the worst that could befall our country. Her people have succumbed to the luxuries brought from distant lands, and are not so hardy now as when I first marshalled their hosts on the upland plains; and now that Nubia is lost to them they feel the absence of the dangerously delectable foods they obtained from thence. If this land of Ulmeca must be lost, too, it were well that it should be lost quickly, so that the generation now upspringing may grow used to the ample if humbler fare of their own fatherland."

To all of which I must needs mournfully assent, adding that of the two evils it were better to leave Ulmeca in the hands of its native savages than in possession of our hostile kindred, who would ever prove a thorn in our side.

For days we marched wearily through the hot region that lies nearest the coast, now crossing parched, sandy plains, now fertile stretches of aromatic shrubs thick-clustered with beautiful wild flowers, now cutting our way through dense copses of high trees, and anon passing a tract of mingled sterility and abundance, showing here a flat, treeless plain and there a patch of the richest bloom and most glossy tropical vegetation, growing in rank profusion. Pressing inland, we next passed large fruitful groves of indigo and vanilla, intermingled with the homely banana, flourishing its shining leaves in the overpowering heat of the vertical solar rays, and higher still, as we advanced, ever ascending a gradual slope, clumps of liquid-amber trees, and through them we gained a glimpse ahead of a range of snow-clad mountain summits towering to the sky.

Towards these, as yet having seen no foe and equally certain that there were none between us and the sea-board, we kept on, and, reaching them, climbed their rough slopes, passing now and then on our upward journey deep and precipitous ravines, whose depths glowed with life and vegetation like that we had left behind, in strange contrast to the table-land we soon reached, thick-grown with oak and pine, larch and cypress, sycamore and cedar. Once on the table-land we struck directly west, in search for the valley where the chief settlement of our countrymen was fixed, and midway across the great level, at the end of a day's tired tramping, coming round the shadow of a spur of limestone rock, the lovely spot burst on our view.

The oval valley,* near seventy leagues in circuit, bound in by huge, looming walls and ramparts of pophyritic rock —an imposing but ineffectual barrier to outside foes—was an idyllic retreat in which to live, and I did not wonder when I saw it that the Governor Quitzaal should have wished to keep it for himself and those with him rather than be overcrowded with extra colonists from Atlantis. At the verge of the valley we encamped for the night, casting many longing glances before we fell asleep at its waving fields of maze and other grain, its cotton plantations, its fruit-hung aloe groves, and its five lakes, shimmering like burnished silver shields in the fading light.

At earliest dawn we were afoot again and marching down the hillside into the great hollow, scaring thousands of bright-plumaged birds from their haunts as we went, no enemy appearing to bar our progress, till we emerged, a week later, upon a level plain at the further side of which our foremost scouts descried a group of buildings of Atlantian character clustered round a pyramidal cone, built after the fashion of our own and the Egyptian tombs of royalty.

Here, suddenly, without any warning, we were attacked by a vast horde of the barbarians—Huacans, as they called themselves—outnumbering our army, now thinned by various causes, by more than two to one, and keeping us in check for the most of a day. But these savages, for all their frightful ugliness, with their reddish cinnamon complexions, straight black hair, slanting eyes, beardless chins, protruding cheek bones, prominent noses and narrow foreheads, were no match for my men's superior weapons and discipline, and were compelled to beat a hasty retreat, leaving thousands of dead on the field of conflict. Yet they fought well, those dusky warriors, and many of my soldiers, I think, who had regarded them lightly before, held a different opinion after that battle!

With all possible speed I pressed onward, feeling sorely the need of horses—of which there were none in Ulmeca, and to which none could well be brought, on account of the difficulty and expense of transport—and by noon we reached the town, the headquarters of the colony where Quitzaal lived, or *had lived*; for we entered only a collection of deserted buildings and empty streets, answering and echoing weirdly to the sound of our footsteps and voices. The wolf had left his lair; the eagle had forsaken his nest!

I ascended the brick-built pyramid, towering upward for the height of thirty full-grown men, and from its summit surveyed the surrounding country. It was a magnificent prospect that met my gaze, revealing the curling blue smoke of several distant savage villages, many little winding streams and tiny lakes, a barren ridge of snow-topped hills to the south, as well as a conical cloud-piercing mountain, and to the north two great burning cones belching fire and fine ash from their flaming throats; but no sign was there of the rebels I had come so far to seek. I came down at last, cursing my luck as I came, and sought counsel with my officers and Marenso as to our wisest course.

"For my part," said Atris, "I say, let us rest here awhile and see if they attack us, finding we do not continue to seek them."

"Yes, and perchance wait here till we grow old, or be surprised by a night attack, or find our retreat cut off and the ships destroyed or gone if we ever get sight of the sea again!" cried Cuzcon, a veteran who had served under Dulo the Ninth. "Art unused to campaigning, my worthy comrade, to advise thusly?"

"So think I," struck in Valdo, "and my way would be to keep forward in the open whenever possible, and make the circuit of the valley."

"And not knowing its passes and defiles, get delayed in its tangled forests, have our men picked off by constant harassing skirmishes, and find ourselves here again, in worse plight than we are now? Good advice, forsooth!" This from Atris hotly.

"I must own that I agree with the last remarks," said another and younger officer, "but I like not the prospect of waiting here to be hemmed in and cut off."

"The more so," I observed, "when, as several of our Huacan prisoners say, the Governor has made league against us with these people, and the Ulmecs too, who were formerly hostile to him. 'Tis my belief that we have only come so far unmolested so that the three allies may gather their forces together to destroy us with one fell stroke while we are too far from the coast to make a safe retreat. But they are counting without knowledge, I

* NOTE.—The Valley of Mexico without a doubt. Arnon's early description, it will be seen, is almost identical with that of the first Spanish conquerors.

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imagine. However, as the oldest of us here by a thousand years, the advice of Marenso would be weighty and welcome. What thinkest thou of this matter, Sleeper?"

"I think with Cuzcon," Marenso answered, "that to wait here were folly; and with Atris that to go further into the interior were equal foolishness. What I advise is to move out upon the open plain outside this empty city and encamp, then liberate some of our Huacan prisoners, first letting them purposely overhear some of our officers say that we are only an advance guard and that within a short time a force as large again will be marching to our relief; and last of all, sternly command the barbarians not to divulge any information they may have learned in our camp. I will wager a dozen gold pieces of the heaviest weight that not many days will pass before the whole rebel army, renegade and savage, will be throwing itself to death upon our spears."

"It shall be done and without delay!" I cried, captivated with the cunning scheme. "Atris, bring in our prisoners, and we will lay the trap forthwith."

All dissension being thus happily averted by Marenso's tact, we waited till the red-faced men were brought in, maturing our plans meantime. There were some half-score of them, fierce, stubborn-looking men, garmented in all their native ruggedness, most of them able, by long familiarity with our settlers, to speak and understand our tongue, yet all obstinately refusing to utter a word, remaining mute as wooden idols 'mid all the jeers that our men made use of in futile effort to cause them to open their lips. A strange race, those Huacans!

"Now what is thy wish, General, concerning these captives?" asked Cuzcon, hustling them forward. "What is thy intent as to these beings who smear themselves with vermilion?"

"Nay; first tell me what you would with such encumbrances," I asked, keeping a straight face in spite of the old war-dog's queer smile.

"What would I do with them?" he re-echoed. "Why, just hang them up by their own bow-strings to the nearest tree."

"How long would such fruit be in coming to a full ripeness?" asked Valdo solemnly.

"Should not wait to discover," said Cuzcon, with a grim gesture, "but should lop them off by the neck as soon as hung, for they have the tint of ripeness upon their cheeks already. But before I twisted the cord to tie them up I should make them shave, for surely men never grew to this age without, in any other land than this!" And even Marenso's solemn face wrinkled into a broad smile at the pointed taunt.

During this colloquy, intended solely to embitter the savages against us, so that they might be trusted to carry any information that we might let fall, not a muscle of their dark visages moved, not an eye flashed, not a sign escaped them.

"'Twill be time to jest," said Marenso, "when the war is done and we are away for home. What is now your will concerning these prisoners? Shall we slay them or let them go?"

"Spirit tongues carry no tidings," muttered Cuzcon, fingering his sword-hilt.

"Silence!" I said, in mock severity, "I am no butcher and this place is not yet a shambles! You know full well that in a week or two we shall be joined by another army from Atlantis and shall then be able to defy these savages and their rebel allies to do their worst. Let them go; before a week is past we can laugh at all their stratagems. Let them go."

As I said this I kept a keen glance, cornerwise, upon the prisoners, and saw a gleam of savage joy flash from eye to eye, lighting their dark faces with a sudden glow of interest, yet so quickly come and gone as to be well-nigh imperceptible.

A chorus of disapproval burst upon my ears when I finished speaking; a cry of loud and angry discontent at my leniency.

"Hang them, or slit their throats!" growled old Cuzcon impatiently.

"Bind them to a tree for sling and arrow practise," said Valdo, with well-assumed coolness.

"Spear them through, nor waste further time," cried Atris bloodthirstily.

"Silence!" I again commanded. "I have given my orders. Let them go free; they are too small game for revenge. And, hark ye!" I said to the savages, as the soldiers cut their thongs, a fresh thought arising, "bear this message from Arnon the Iron-fingered to the white chief you serve, Quitzaal, and Vichri his friend—that I esteem them cowardly poltroons, and that I will search every hill and valley, every cave, every mine, every little town or hamlet, and fire every forest in all this land, before I leave its shores without them, dead or alive. Tell this to the chiefs, who are unfit to lead an army of suckling babes! Now, go with all speed, lest some of my men do you a hurt."

No further telling they needed, but rushed to the portal, out across the silent street, and dashing into the nearest copse swiftly as bullets from a sling, disappeared without so much as a word of gratitude. When they were fairly gone we looked at each other, smiling grimly at our success.

"We shall have all their available force upon us before many days have gone," I chuckled, "and we had better be preparing to greet them right royally. Out upon the plain yonder we shall fare better than cooped mid these deserted houses."

The others, agreeing, laughed, and went out to spread the news.

At sunrise our little force of 45,000, all told, was camped in eager excitement outside the forsaken town, our sentinels being posted on all the rude tracks that converged from the forest. Five days passed without sign of the hidden foe, but on the sixth morning we knew that our plot had succeeded by hearing the long shrill whistle of danger from the outermost sentries placed towards the hills. Soon these sentries were driven in before the advancing lines of the rebel and barbarian host, and by the time our men were set in waiting array, longing to come to closer quarters, the foe had got within reach of our most expert slingers, and a contest of skill between the marksmen raged furiously for over an hour. Then they fell back, waiting, I surmised, for their full number to come up before engaging us in the death-grip, giving us breathing time for further preparation.

Looking back, it seems that I have written much of war and blood and the play of men's fiercer passions, overmuch it may be, to please your sight, O, Unknown Reader! and yet I promise you that above the sound of the shock of spears, the whistle of arrows in darkening clouds, the hissing of bullets, the cries of rage and defiance, of hatred and pain, the tread of flying feet, and the shouts of exultant victory, you shall hear the note of a satisfied vengeance, and the mad despairing shriek of a woman's baffled jealousy. Ah! it seems now as though I wrought once more in that wide, forest-bounded, hill-circled plain, 'mid the surging masses of white men and red, true men and traitors, royalists, renegades, and barbarians, cutting my way through them with that right good sword as through the twisted tangled undergrowth and creepers of a dense, dark wood. Such scenes, such moments, come to few of the sons of earth, and to them but seldom in our scanty span of years, and 'tis no marvel that the recollection of them should remain a clear image on the ruffled pool of memory, when many other things are blurred or altogether missing from the picture.

Yet vivid as that image is, I hover, hesitate, and dally round the recording of it as a bashful youth delays the telling of his love to a wilful maid. Away, ye meditative thoughts, ye nervous tremors, that I may to my story.

Thus went the Battle of Ulmeca.

(To be continued.)

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JUMBLED STORY No. 22.] [See Page 679.

NOVEL SAGO.

The sun sank down in the sky, and twilight came round, until the morning sun rose up in the sky.

He leant back in his chair, and threw his black crown to the soles of her white feet. A girdle of comfort stole over him. He opened them again.

"Oh, that's good," he cried. "Ha, ha! Why, dare you speak so. Who are you?"

"The fierce beasts of the forest shall hear the song.

"I will write a Song of Love," cried the Poet, and all nations, and all kindreds shall take up the Song of Love, and turn from the trail.

The Poet sank down on the lounge. He looked sharply, as though he would strike the other.

He closed his eyes. A delightful sense of sound of the clashing of steel, and the neighing of long watches of the night, and worked the hours searched for Love. He looked in the palaces of kings, gazed at the beautiful queen. Days went by and, he looked in the hovels of paupers.

The Poet shut down the window and walked out of the house, he cared not whither.

One morning, there came into the gallery a little throne, clad all in sheening white, a smile on her card, and the name was the name on the picture.

And Love smiled from her eyes.

And as he gazed at the Queen of Love, the words float up into the air, and the great birds of prey leave the green grass untouched.

The Poet gazed at her for a moment, horror shall ring out on the silent air, and all men, and horses, and the shrieks of men, shall float the music of Love."

"The king shall hear it as he sits upon his throne of Love, and the soldiers shall drop their swords to happiness.

"And the gentle deer shall raise their heads, and old Faith shall be new.

But Love does not come when he is called. Some crossed before her, white, entrancing.

"The queen at his side shall hear the words of earth, and all shall be still, as the last sweet notes wrote again a new Song of Love. And Love guided over the earth, but still the Poet sat in his seat and stricken. His blood seemed to freeze in his veins. Well, she's fine, ain't she?"

"She seems about to knock you over—my Queen. "A Song of Love" in his hand, he read it through into the eyes of the queen. It seemed that Love days passed into weeks, and always the Poet was at a house near by. He pushed open a door.

"And outside in the courtyard the princes shall cease their rush for gold."

A queen stood before him on the steps of her couch, smoking, and drinking brandy. Her hair was the Song of Love.

And then—why then he saw Love smiling down on his hand, he wrote across the paper: "The Song for the last time. He laid it on the coals.

The little man laughed loudly.

And the flames licked it up.

"And all that is black shall be white. And the precious stones encircled her waist. Her arms were done up untidily on the top of her head. She leered "and all the world shall hear it."

"Is it possible," he groaned, "that *you* created hair away from his high, white forehead.

The artist did not mind.

He sat down at the table, and taking his pen in his hand, and inspiration flowed from his pen.

Then with a loud cry he rushed from the room.

Presently, weary, footsore, and hungry, he saw an garret window. The roar of the London traffic shall listen, and pause in their flight, and poise, from tree to tree, and remain very still.

"Above the din of the battlefield, above the room. A woman, painted, hideous, was lying on a open door before him. He entered, and passed *her?*"

The Poet's dream dissolved away.

"The great, new city of Babylon shall hear the man with untidy, flowing hair. He strode up to the ground."

"Don't speak to me," he cried. "Begone!"

Very beautiful were the words of the Poet, and come with me, I will show you my model."

So he laid down his pen, and went out into the words that I shall sing, and for a space men will listen, and their games shall be forgotten.

"And peace shall fall on the land, and joy, and sweet was his music. He wrote on through the bright, sunlit streets. Throughout the long day he had deserted them. He looked at the artist.

But the little man laughed more loudly than came up from the streets.

He took the Poet by the arm, and led him into wondering, over the earth.

The Poet rose from his chair, and threw open his lips, her glistening hair falling down from her golden first words of the song, gently, softly, and through a hall, and sank down on a velvet lounge.

"So come to me, Love," cried the Poet, "and guide him from the eyes of a beautiful woman.

That night, he made a fire in his room, and taking his post, adoring, worshipping.

"And the music of the song," he cried, "shall thou art."

"And men shall hold their breath.

"Yes, man," he said, "that's so. If you care to man that picture's mine. I painted it."

"What do you mean?" he said sharply. "How before. "Here's proof," he cried, and drew out a thing was lacking in the Poet's song.

"The little sparrows shall hear it as they flutter and rules his land.

"Then, from the silence, shall come again the then louder and louder, till the triumphant strain of the song shall die away.

The Poet, dazed and trembling, advanced into the the Poet, and stared at him insolently.

"Then a great quietness shall come over the at her visitor, showing her broken teeth.

The Poet rose to his feet, and drew his arm back my hand, that I may write of thee, and tell men what of his song framed themselves in his mind. He fiercely backwards and forwards across his room.

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FLEUR-DE-BLÉ.

It was the eve of Saint Nicholas, and grand preparations were going on for the next day's celebration at a certain house in the market-place of the little village of Wavre, belonging to the baker, Hans Jans.

Upstairs, in the large room with the two windows, over the shop, the light of a great fire and a tiny night-lamp glistened on the polished oak of the handsome spare bed with its pink beflowered curtains, in which Jans' little daughter, Fleur-de-Blé, was lying.

Grandmamma Jans from time to time placed another log upon the fire, carefully turning over the blazing coals, and, pushing back her spectacles over the brown bands which she wore upon her white hair, she went softly to the bed.

"Fleur," she said gently, opening the curtains. And the red lamp threw its light upon Fleur-de-Blé, cuddled down under the bedclothes, with only her tiny little arms and face showing.

Twice since the great tall clock in the shop had struck seven, calling Fleur-de-Blé, and the child had not awakened.

She kept hearing the tinkling of the little bell at the shop door, which rang every time a customer came in; and a great many customers were coming in that evening, for everyone knew that Jans made the finest gingerbread men in the whole village.

And every time the bell rang, Grandmamma Jans would wonder if it were for a six-sous man, or one for a franc. Those that sold for a franc had white-sugared hair and pink-sugared cheeks, while the six-sous men were nothing but dough.

Hans ought to have made some two-franc men, too, for there will always be people willing to pay two francs when their neighbours pay only one. Madame Jans stood behind the counter, waiting on the customers and looking askance at the boys outside, who with noses red and hands in their pockets, were gathered about the shop window, admiring the gingerbread men; while Jans in the baking-room was saying:

"Come, boys! On with the dough! I'm going to make Fleur's man now."

And through the window of the little back room, Madame Jans could see Hans, with his bare arms, in his white blouse and white trousers, coming and going in the ruddy light among the baker boys bending over the kneading-trough.

He took the largest of the moulds, buttered it, poured the dough in slowly, and plunged it quickly into the oven. "Ah, Fleur," thought Madame Jans, "what a handsome gingerbread man your papa is making for you! There is not another man in all Wavre who can give such a shape to dough. I certainly couldn't have done better, being myself a baker's daughter, than marry Hans."

Jans at this very moment was drawing out from the burning coals a magnificent gingerbread man, smoking and light, which he detached from the pan with a sharp blow, and laid on a shelf sprinkled with flour. He was a portly gentleman in small clothes, with a mitred cap upon his head, a queue down his back, a cane with a bishop's cross in his hand, and pockets overflowing with toys. On his buckled shoes there was a scroll, and printed on it these words:

"Saint Nicholas."

Then he put pink icing on the cheeks and nose of the saint, sprinkled aniseed over his peruke, spread chocolate on his coat, and currant jelly on his waistcoat, powdered the cross and cap with gold-dust, and put a layer of white sugar on his hands and stockings; then he called his wife, and showed her his masterpiece, saying:

"See, Annette, the gingerbread is thick with citron, orange and raisins. I wouldn't sell this Saint Nicholas for five francs, for I might not be able to make another one so well for ten."

Fleur-de-Blé awoke suddenly, saying in her soft little voice:

"Grandmamma, I smell something good. Has Saint Nicholas been here yet?"

This little voice of Fleur's seemed like the last vibrations of sharply-struck crystal, when one hears nothing but a sound dying away.

"No, my child," replied Grandmamma Jans, putting the little arms under the bedclothes. "Saint Nicholas hasn't come yet, but he is going his rounds about town and that is what smells so good."

"Grandmamma, what makes it smell good when Saint Nicholas goes his rounds?"

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"Because Papa Jans is baking his gingerbread men in the oven. He has some six-sous men and some for a franc. Won't you have a little drink?"

"Grandmamma," replied the child, "I have had a dream. I dreamed that Saint Nicholas came for me in my bed. And he had a long beard like that picture of our Lord that Godmother Dictus gave me. And I said: 'Good-morning, Saint Nicholas, patron of good children.' And he said to me, grandmamma, just like this: 'Fleur-de-Blé, I am indeed your patron, for you are a good little girl, and I like good little children. Come with me.' And I said: 'Where, good Saint Nicholas?' and he said: 'Come.' Mamma gave me a pretty white dress, and said she would come later. And when I entered paradise there were little boys and girls there, all in white, playing. And they took me in their arms, and told me they were always at play, night and morning, and they had playthings that our Lord gave them, ever so much prettier than those papa gave me last New Year. And the little girls had dolls as large as they were, and that could courtesy and say: 'Thank you, madam.' Then Saint Nicholas kissed me, and said: 'Play, my child. I love you dearly. You shall have a doll, too, that will say: "Thank you, madam."' And then, grandmamma, I smelt something good and I woke up."

"Here is Dr. Trousseau coming to bid you good-morning, Fleur-de-Blé," said Grandmamma Jans suddenly.

The Doctor opened the door, and going straight to the bed, said:

"It is Papa Trousseau, come to see how you are, my dear. Let's feel that little pulse. Hum-hum-m; and now for the tongue. Your cheeks are flushed, little one. There has been some excitement going on. Ah, yes. I know now. Saint Nicholas' Eve. That's it."

He puts his hands to the child's heart and then his ear, and his eyes suddenly began to roll under his heavy grey eyebrows, like the ball the men play ninepins with at "The Headless Rooster."

Just then Jans and his wife came in like shadows, one behind the other, on tiptoe, and holding their breath, and Dr. Trousseau began to whistle softly to conceal his anxiety.

Then, taking his hat and umbrella, he dashed off to the vicarage to let the vicar know.

Now, the vicar was very fond of the Jans' and used to dine with them often on Sundays in the summer.

By-and-bye, the vicar, with his three-cornered cap on one side, opened the door of the little shop and said to Papa and Mamma Jans, who were counting up their day's sales, laying the sous and francs each in a little pile of their own:

"Here I am, as you see. How do you do, Madame Jans? I've come to see if Fleur-de-Blé has put her little wooden shoes in the chimney corner."

"Why, it is Monsieur le Vicaire," said Jans, taking his pipe from his mouth and leading him into the little back parlour. "Grandmother Jans will be very glad to see you."

Just then the door of the room above was opened, and Grandmamma Jans cried quickly:

"Hans! Hans!"

"Oh, yes, I know," said Jans. "Fleur-de-Blé keeps calling for me every minute to have me tell her about Saint Nicholas, the dear angel. Come upstairs, Monsieur le Vicaire."

"Dear, dear!" cried grandmamma, when she saw them. "Fleur-de-Blé has just got up, and she wants to go down in the market-place. Your blessing, Monsieur le Vicaire."

Fleur-de-Blé, with wide opened eyes, was gazing towards the windows with a vacant stare.

"Fleur!" cried Jans like a madman, and he laid the little child down in the warm blankets again.

Monsieur le Vicaire, turning towards Jans, saw that he was as white as the sheets on the bed, and that his hands were trembling.

Fleur-de-Blé gently closed her eyes and fell asleep, but her little hands, as transparent as a night-lamp in which a light is burning, moved idly in vague gesture on the counterpane.

"Courage, Jans," said the vicar, gently laying his hand on his shoulder. "Think of our Saviour Who suffered the Passion."

But Jans, with haggard eyes, was looking at his child and did not hear him.

Then Fleur began to move her lips softly, as if she were whispering to someone on the other side of the night, and at last she said:

"I am Fleur-de-Blé, the daughter of Jans, the baker, who lives in the market-place."

She was silent a moment, and then went on: "Good-morning. Always at play. Dolls. Thank you, madam."

Her voice was like the softest note of a violin, and while she spoke a wan little smile was on her lips, which seemed like a little light cloud melting away in the night. Jans saw her pretty little arm emerge from the sheets, and she waved her hand slowly, as she did for a bow when she used to say her little pieces.

Then, after half-an-hour, Fleur-de-Blé awoke again.

"Hasn't Saint Nicholas come yet?" she asked.

"No, Fleur," said Jans. "Saint Nicholas never comes before midnight."

"Oh, that is very long," said the little child. "But he comes from far away, and his reindeer are tired. Papa, you must get an armchair for Saint Nicholas, and a smaller one for the reindeer."

"Indeed, I will," said Jans. "I'll let Saint Nicholas have the handsome armchair that stands in the corner—the one Aunt Catherine has when she comes to see us at Christmas."

And at about eleven o'clock, Jans went downstairs to prepare the Saint Nicholas gifts for Fleur-de-Blé. He had bought a large doll, with eyes of mother-of-pearl, blonde hair, and a jointed body; and a cradle too, lined with blue satin, and hanging from a crescent moon. He had paid fifteen francs for it all.

He put the doll in the cradle and arranged the doll's clothes in a large box—the silk mantle, the barege dress, and the rose-coloured hat. And he laughed softly to himself, thinking of the joy of his Fleurette, for handling all these pretty things had brought back a little happiness into his heart.

He took off his shoes and went upstairs twice in his stocking-feet; the first time to carry the plates of bonbons, the second to carry the doll, the cradle, and the box of doll's clothes. And he put them all in the little room next to that in which Fleur-de-Blé was lying.

And Fleur slept on.

"I want to see her when she gets her Saint Nicholas presents," said the vicar to Grandmamma Jans. "That is what I'm staying for."

But that is not why the vicar stayed. He drew his breviary from his pocket, and his lips moving softly in an inaudible manner, he began to read near the little lamp. But from time to time the vicar looked at Fleur-de-Blé, and then he would say in a half whisper, closing the book with his finger in it to keep the place: "O Lord, have mercy on these poor people."

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When midnight came, Fleur-de-Blé heard a noise in the house, and, opening her eyes, she asked if it wasn't Saint Nicholas coming down the chimney. And Jans, who knew very well that it was the boys in the oven-room, said, as he raised his flour-besprinkled eyebrows, that he certainly thought he could hear the reindeers' hoofs. And he added:

"I'll go and see in a minute."

He put his ears to the door, with his head forward, as if he were listening attentively, and then went downstairs with long, slow strides, and an air of the greatest mystery.

And suddenly, from below, they could hear loud cries of joy.

It was Jans saying: "Fleur, my little Fleur, he has come! Open your little hands!" And when he returned, he was carrying the armchair, the one that Aunt Catherine used to sit in, and on it were the cradle, the doll, the box, the gingerbread man, and the plates of sweetmeats.

"Thank you, Saint Nicholas. Thank you, for Fleur," he called down the staircase.

And when the child saw the pretty doll and the cradle, her little lips broke into a smile, as a flower opens to the sun.

Then Jans showed her the dust on the armchair (he had put it there himself from his dusty shoes), and said, laughing with all his heart:

"See here are the footprints of Saint Nicholas' steeds!"

Soon after Fleur-de-Blé dropped her head like a stone bruised tree whose sap is oozing away, and, pale against the whiteness of the great pillow, with her pretty, sad smile still upon her lips, she fell asleep.

A heavy silence filled the house, the shop clock struck one, and a dog could be heard howling in a neighbouring yard.

"Monsieur le Vicaire," said Grandmamma Jans, clasping her hands, "I fear that there is a great sorrow coming down upon this house."

"Grandmamma Jans," replied the vicar, raising his hands towards Heaven, "we must think of God, with Whom all things are possible."

And as the minutes went by silence grew deeper and deeper about the great bed, where the darling of the household was asleep. Outside, the snow was falling against the panes with a soft rustling of a bird who wants to come in. And Jans, like a man in a fever, with his teeth chattering, repeated over and over to himself the name of his little Fleur.

While these things were going on at the Jans', a bright, cheerful glow was lighting up one of the rooms in Butcher Canu's house. Dolls and wooden horses covered the big table and everywhere were flags and pipes and drums.

Suddenly the good man, who was putting on his night-cap, said to his wife as he looked towards the Jans':

"Indeed it doesn't seem natural. I see shadows coming and going on the white curtain. If Fleur was as strong as our own little girls we wouldn't need to worry, but she is like a bit of down blown by the wind."

In all the houses everywhere, in town or country, the little children of the poor and of the rich were fast asleep, dreaming, with their heads on their arms, of the toys and sweetmeats they would find on awaking.

Grandmamma Jans had let her knitting fall on her lap, and was dozing by the fire, her spectacles on her nose. But neither Papa nor Mamma Jans thought of sleep, they stood in front of the bed, with clasped hands, not daring to look at each other for fear of letting their tears be seen. And the vicar, with hands clasped like them, said: "Fleur's breathing is like the sound of a church bell as the summer wind carries it far into the country when it is about to cease."

The little child slumbered on so quietly that nothing was heard in the room but the crackling of the oil in the lamp and the heavy breathing of Grandmamma Jans.

When the good old lady awoke she was astonished at first to find that the Vicar was still there, but as she saw Papa and Mamma Jans on their knees near Fleur, she drew out her large checked handkerchief, and began weeping in it with the sobs of a little child.

At that very moment Fleur-de-Blé awoke, and, very softly, so softly that Grandmamma Jans, who was slightly deaf, could not hear her, she murmured:

"Good-morning, St. Nicholas."

And then still more softly:

"Morning, papa, mamma, gran'm'ma."

She slept till dawn. And as the day came, her life, like a chilly bird returning to the sunny lands when the cold winds blow, returned to the great light.

Softly the light went out. And awesome sadness passed over the old furniture so often caressed by her little hands. The ivory Christ on the wall seemed to bend beneath the cross.

It was the hour when cocks crow. The children of Wavre awakened earlier than usual, went listening at the door to see if there were any noises in the house.

A cry rang out in the chamber.

"Ah, vicar!" cried Jans, throwing himself into the arms of the priest.

"Jans, Fleur has just entered Paradise!" replied the vicar.

And never from that day to this has poor Monsieur Jans ever made any more gingerbread men for St. Nicholas' Day.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AFTER THE CHAIN WAS BROKEN.

"'WILL he die?' I hope so, my lady—when he's about eighty. God bless him! We can't spare such a man as he is. Now, please, my lady. The bottle, and you'll see a glass. Bring two, please, and that water jug."

Olive sprang to her feet, and easily found what was wanted, when Rancer, after a business-like glance at the label, removed the stopper, and poured two small portions of the clear liquid into glasses, added water, and offered one glass to Lady Braetoun, but she made an impatient gesture.

"Yes: drink it, my lady. You want it, too. Don't waste time. It's only what you would call *sal volatile*. And you must hold up."

She drank the contents of the glass without a word, and then, in obedience to another order, fetched a sofa cushion, which she placed beneath Murray's head as the man raised him up and lowered him down again, prior to beginning to trickle, a little at a time, the stimulant between his parted lips.

"Beg pardon, my lady," whispered Rancer meaningly; "wouldn't you like to wash your hands?"

Olive glanced down, and then shuddered, for they were terribly marked, and she hurriedly went to the little mahogany stand and began to remove the traces there.

"His blood—stained with his blood," she thought; and the horror of her position began to reassert itself, and the desire to escape from the place; but with it came a passionate feeling of anger against her husband which she could not restrain, and she walked firmly back to where Rancer knelt with the glass still in his hand, ready to look up and give her a nod, as much as to say:

"He's coming round."

A few minutes later there were hasty steps in the hall, then a slight, tall, and grey, elderly man entered and closed the door after him.

"Dr. Murray!" he said. "Good Heavens! how was this?"

He glanced first at Rancer and then at Olive, with a curious, inquisitive light in his searching eyes which made her shrink and the angry stubborn feeling increase.

"Patient, sir," said Rancer quickly. "Old patient, sir. Touch of D.T. again. Got away from home. Mad sort of fit, and shot at my master. Ball through the left scapula. Lung untouched. Another ball cut deep furrow in the inner part of left arm."

The surgeon darted another quick glance at Olive, one full of dislike, as he took in her beautiful, agitated features, and the hot, indignant blood began to mantle in her pale face.

"Humph! *Cherchez la femme*," he said to himself, as he went down on one knee and began to examine his patien carefully. "Poor fellow! How could he be such a fool I shouldn't have thought it of him."

Rancer placed a chair for Lady Braetoun, but she shook her head and stood looking on, and then shivered, for there was a slight trembling about the victim's eyelids, and a twitching of the lips.

"Plugged entrance and exit, Rancer?" said the surgeon, with a quick look.

"Yes, sir."

"How near to the articulation of the arm-bone?"

"Very close, sir."

"Shattered?"

"Can't say, sir. I only tried to stop the bleeding."

"Quite right. What's in that glass?"

"Ammonia, sir."

There was another examination, and Olive became aware now of the fact that Murray's eyes had opened wildly, that he was conscious of what was going on, and that there was a wistful, imploring look directed at her which made her tremble; but the eyes closed again, and she saw that he had relapsed into insensibility.

"I don't think I'll disturb these bandages for the present. The shock is bad enough, and the bleeding has stopped. You had better order a bed to be made up for him here at once, madam. Safer than moving him upstairs."

"Oh!" cried Olive wildly; "then you think his wounds dangerous?"

"H'm—no, not dangerous, but bad enough for so highly strung and nervous a man. You must have a nurse sent for, but I suppose you will wish to nurse him to some extent yourself?"

"I? Impossible."

"I beg pardon. I was under the impression that you were Mrs. Murray, though I was——"

"I am Lady Braetoun, sir," said Olive with dignity; and she darted a look of resentment at the speaker.

"And the insane patient——?"

"I cannot explain or say any more to you than you have already been told."

"No, no, madam, of course not," said the surgeon hurriedly. "I will send on a nurse, with your permission."

"I have no authority to give permission, sir," she said coldly. "Pray do what is necessary to save Dr. Murray's life. I came on here in dread lest anything should occur, my husband being in so excited a state, but I was too late."

"Pray do not trouble yourself to make these explanations, madam," said the doctor as coldly; and the air of half contempt, half dislike, intensified as he looked at her. "I will go now, and send in a nurse, and as soon as she comes I must ask you——as a friend of Dr. Murray?"

"Yes, sir: Dr. Murray is an old friend of my husband."

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"Exactly. I will ask you then to see that the arrangement I have ordered is made."

"If it is necessary—yes."

The surgeon shrugged his shoulders.

"I will stay, sir," she said, with another flash of resentment, and as she turned from him she caught Rancer's eyes, and saw that he was watching with a peculiar look as if the surgeon's manner had influenced him, and her father's nature within her roused a stubborn feeling approaching recklessness.

In her terribly excited state anger was now taking the place of fear, and she listened to what more the surgeon had to say without a word, watching his various acts, as it were, in a stubborn silence, till he bowed coldly, and left her with Rancer, whose manner now seemed quite changed.

No: she determined she would not—she could not—go now, and leave Murray dying, let them—let the whole world, think what it would; she could bear it.

For a brief time a creeping sensation of pain came over her as she thought of Braetoun and the pistol he had taken with him; but it passed off, for she felt that he would not use it against himself. His true nature seemed to be unveiling itself more and more before her. His past infidelities she had been ready to forgive, and had forgiven; but this last threat to return to the only woman who had ever loved him, and the cruel insults which had accompanied it, in the presence of Murray, seemed to break the last tie between them.

"He has cast me off. I cannot go back now."

In spite of herself she turned to look at him who lay there pale and motionless, and mingled with the horror with which she regarded the cause of her anguish, there was a curious feeling of pity—for what had been his sin?

She turned from him, though, frightened, but only for the anger to return.

Rancer was looking at her furtively, and, feeling that she divined his thoughts, she forced herself to try and think of her plan of action. But again her ideas were diverted back to the present, for Rancer spoke.

"I don't think you need be quite so much alarmed, my lady," he said; "and I should be very grateful if you would give me orders what to do, for I feel too much upset to plan. I oughtn't to send for the police, ought I?"

"The police? No!" she said in an excited whisper.

"Thank you, my lady. Then we've settled that: it's one thing off my mind. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me what you think about sending for someone else to come."

Ah, yes; send for someone else. Why had she not thought of this before—her father?

She was about to request the man to send at once, but a strange feeling of dread assailed her.

Send for him to come and find her there? She felt that she could not. A few hours earlier it would have appeared to her as the most natural thing for her to do; but all that was changed. She had been charged with being one of the most guilty of creatures; doctor and servant had evidently looked upon her as the mainspring of the tragedy, and, if she sent for her father, what guarantee had she that he would not think the same?

Impossible? No, he would find her there, learn that Braetoun had followed and found her.

Roderick had attacked and nearly killed Murray.

No, she dared not send for her father to come there; he might doubt her. Why not, when in her despair she was almost beginning to doubt herself, and feel that Murray's passionate declaration of his love had in some way made her a partner of his guilt?

Turning to Rancer, she asked what friends there were of Murray's near.

"None, my lady," said the man, as he still seemed to look at her curiously. "Master has so few friends. There are his two cousins—two maiden ladies."

"Yes? Then they must be fetched at once."

"But they went to Florence about a month since, my lady. I posted a letter for them from my master only about three days ago."

Olive clasped her hands in anguish. What should she do? She must not stay, though the feeling was upon her that if she went and left Murray to the care of some paid nurse, and he died, she would always feel that she was to blame.

Then a thought came. His old schoolfellow.

"Mr. Daines," she cried.

"Ah, yes. I did not think of him, my lady. Shall I fetch him?"

"Yes," cried Olive, on the impulse of the moment, and the man hurried out, while as the door closed she started toward it to arrest him, but it was too late.

She ran to the window to tap as Rancer went by, but he had gone in the other direction, and she turned, now, to stand trembling and watching the recumbent figure, looking so ghastly and strange in the gloomy room.

It was horrible! Alone with him like that. Every action on her part seemed to be compromising her more and more. But she felt that she could not stir. Once she went to the bell to ring for one of the maids, but her hand fell to her side, and at last she walked slowly to Murray to stand gazing down at him, finding him look so cold and still that the fancy came that he must be dead; and as if drawn to him, she sank down on one knee to listen for his breath.

But she could hear nothing, neither could she see the slightest movement; and, trembling more with horror, she at last stretched out a hand to touch his forehead.

It was cold and damp, and, wild now with fear, her hand glided to his wrist, and she felt for the pulse there, but felt in vain. Still it was warm, and she let her fingers glide to his hand; that felt moist and warm too.

The touch slightly roused Murray, who opened his eyes slowly, and looked at her vacantly. Then the light of recognition came into them, and as she loosened her grasp and shrank away, he smiled at her sadly and closed his eyes once more.

An hour passed slowly, during which Murray did not move but seemed to sleep, and then a cab stopped at the door, and she ran to the window in time to see Daines get out and come limping up to the door, Rancer following; then there was the rattle of the latchkey, steps in the hall, and Olive waited for her husband's old schoolfellow to enter.

"Thank Heaven you have come!" she cried, as she held out her hand.

He did not seem to see it, but bowed stiffly, and went by her to kneel down by his friend.

"How has he been?" Daines said sharply, but he had to repeat his question, and he looked up angrily.

"Dr. Murray has only opened his eyes once," said Olive, in a low, choking voice which she vainly tried to make steady.

"But where is the nurse? One was to have been here and a bed prepared."

She gave him a resentful look, but answered humbly enough:

"I could do nothing until Dr. Murray's servant returned."

"No, I suppose not," he said, bending lower over the motionless figure; "but something must be done at once. Will you go now, Lady Braetoun? I'll take charge of my poor friend. You cannot stay here."

"No," she said piteously, "I cannot stay here; but can I not help—can I not do something before I go?"

"You've done harm enough as it is," said Daines to himself, as he bent lower. Then without looking up—"No, I don't see that you can do anything, madam. Poor fellow! he seems pretty well at death's door, and it is our duty to keep that door shut if we can. If he comes to and sees you here it will only make matters worse."

"Mr. Daines," whispered Olive wildly; "you do not understand."

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"I understand all I want to," he replied bitterly. "Rancer, here, has told me that Braetoun came and surprised you together. There, it is of no use to mince matters now. It is very terrible, but I suppose it is quite in the fashion, and Braetoun has only himself to blame."

"Mr. Daines, I cannot explain to you," she cried, in a suffocating voice, "but you are misjudging me horribly, and some day you will bitterly regret all this."

"I hope I shall," he said coldly; "but, excuse me, it is my duty to do the best for the poor fellow, and the first thing is to obtain quiet."

"But Mr. Daines—" she whispered, with her lips quivering; but he broke out angrily.

"In Heaven's name, pray go, madam!" he cried. "I want to save his life if I can. I will stay with him and see that everything possible is done. You have no carriage, I saw; let Rancer get you a cab."

He went to the door and spoke to the man, who was waiting; and, too much stunned by the increase of suffering, Olive stood gazing after him till the door opened again.

"The cab I came in is waiting," he said. "Lady Braetoun ——oh, I have no right to speak," he cried sharply.

"You cannot wound me more deeply than you have done," she replied quietly. "What were you about to say?"

"I was going to implore you not to go back to your own home. There is enough of tragedy here as it is. You had better go straight to your father's house, at once; and for Heaven's sake, madam, make a clean breast of it, and ask his advice as to what had bet.er be done."

"Make a clean breast of it," said Olive, as she sank back in her cab; "I must be guilty then, indeed, if everyone judges me like this. Father will not judge me as others do. But when he knows all, what will he say?"

Nothing: for a new agony awaited her on reaching Eaton Place. Isaac Emsworth was quite insensible, and a month of careful nursing elapsed before he knew a portion of the truth, that which made him swear that at all hazards his child should stay in her old home. By which time Murray had nearly recovered his strength.

CHAPTER L.

Down at Sandiwell.

"It's a wonderful thing, that whitewashing, Baby. Fancy him being sold up and saving that house of his, and going on again just as if nothing had happened. Ah, it's a wonderful thing, is the law."

"Be quiet, Auntie. I don't like to hear you talk like that."

"I must talk a bit, my dear, about what's on my mind."

"But you don't understand anything about it."

"Oh, yes I do, my dear; a little bird tells me a deal, and I hear more than you think. I can't get over it, Baby. He never did beayve to you as he ought, and how you can go on as you do caps me. You ain't no more sperrit than a mouse."

"Be quiet, Auntie; but if you must talk, say something about going with me."

"No, my dear; you don't ketch me on the box of one of them nasty top-heavy gentlemen's stage coach things again. I might get my neck broke, and I suppose they couldn't mend that. And do you know, my dear, I think you'd better give it up. There's a gnawing in my broken arm, and I'm sure as sure we're going to have rain, and if we do it will last all the week."

"Oh Auntie, who wants you to go on a drag? And it's lovely."

"Course it is, my dearest, always is just when it's going to be as bad as bad. That's Nature's own nasty deceitful way, coaxing you into putting on your best frocks, and then down she comes upon 'em and turns your bonnet into a wisp."

"But you can't tell that the weather's going to be bad, Auntie, and I must go."

"Can't tell? Why, my arm kept me awake half the night. The shooting pains was horrible, just starting from the nubble you can feel in the bone, where it growed together again."

"Poor dear Auntie!"

"Ah, you may well say that, my dear. I suffer agonies with it sometimes. I'm sure the doctor left a splint of a bone in it, and never took it out, after it was getting better."

"Impossible, Auntie."

"Ah, you don't know, my dear. I heard 'em talking about the splints when it was set, and the bone wouldn't shoot like that if there hadn't been a sharp bit left in."

"But I must go, Auntie. I want to see the race. Do, do, say you'll come."

"I don't want to go out, Baby, till week after next, and then as things are so slack it'll be just the time for our bit o' ollerday. We'll have three weeks at Margate, and stay at the hotel, and then there'll be no worry about cooking or anything. I do hate those lodging-letting people and their nasty ways of sticking it into you for extries, and sampling your tea, coffee, and things till it's shameful. A dozen o' stout never means more'n ten bottles, if it don't nine. Never mind the race."

"Oh, I must see the race, Auntie. I've have heard all about it from Mr. Daines: he says that it's poor Rod's last chance, and that if the mare doesn't pull it off he is utterly ruined."

"And a good job too. Serve him precious well right, for the way he has behaved to you."

"Oh, Auntie—Auntie!"

"And Baby, Baby! And a precious baby you, for going on thinking about him after his cruel ways to you. Throwing you over again as he has."

"You don't know, Auntie. He has been so ill again."

"But I just do, my dear, for I've got it all out of Mr. Daines when he's been sitting chatting to me."

"Mr. Daines has been abusing Rod to you!" cried the girl, with her eyes flashing.

"No, nor he ain't been abusing my lord to me neither. Mr. Daines never told me anything but what I regularly dragged out of him, but I did find out about my lord being separated from his wife. Mr. Daines is a very good little man, though he has sometimes got a tongue like a razor that's been dipped in vitriol."

Lucy started; her lips parted, and she stared wildly at her aunt.

"But he can't help that. It's all on account of his being different to most people. But I like him, though he does laugh at me; and he loves you, my dear, and if you weren't such a little silly you'd say yes! to him, and be Mrs. Cyrus Daines, as you might be any day you liked."

"Yes, he has been setting you to worry me now," said Lucy disdainfully.

"Never a word. He bears it all like a lamb, and regular suffers to see you think of nothing but that good-for-nothing scamp of a lord, as has thrown you over disgraceful again and again."

Lucy turned her face away, fighting hard to keep down her resentment.

"I'm obliged to speak, for it is disgraceful. Fine dresses and diamonds one time, and let you starve in a gutter the next for all he'd care. Never a shilling sent to you now."

"I don't want his money," said Lucy bitterly.

"No more don't I, and if he'd sent anything we'd have sent it back in a jiffy. We can be quite independent of him, and so I tell my lord. You ain't got a bit o' pride in you, Baby."

"Oh, do leave off, Auntie."

"Shan't. It puts my back up. If he'd chucked you as he did to marry his pretty young wife and stick to her, hard it would have been on you, my precious—but being a lord and no money to keep it up unless he married some, as I s'pose a lord must, I wouldn't ha' said a word—though he might ha' done worse than marry you, for there's a heap of

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money in you, Baby, and you wouldn't ha' been too proud to go on the stage now and then when he run short, though you were his wife. I know you, my pet. You'd ha' worked your fingers to the bone for him, even if you had been my lady, as he ought to have made you."

The tears began to trickle down Lucy's cheeks now.

"But it wasn't to be, and I'm glad of it, for he's one o' that sort as thinks o' nothing but himself. He's behaved shameful to his young wife, same as he has to you, and from what I can hear she's just such a poor fondling kitten of a thing as you are. Don't think about him any more."

"But about Mr. Daines?" said the girl, with a flash of resentment in her eyes.

"No, nor about him neither. Think about your own dear pretty self, and a little bit about your poor old auntie, who'll do anything to make you happy. Now look here, Baby; if you'll only be a good girl, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll chuck up the business, and we'll go and live retired where you like. Paris in France, where it's nice and gay, and plenty of theaytres to remind us of the old days, or we'll have a trip to Switzerland if you like, so long as you don't want me to climb no mountings."

"No, no, Auntie, I only want to go and see this race. I want the mare to win, dear, and save him from ruin."

"Why?"

"Because I love him, Auntie, and always shall. You wouldn't like me to be a miserable, light thing without a bit of heart in me, now, would you?"

"Why, of course not, my precious," cried the old woman, as Lucy threw herself in her lap, and hid her face upon her shoulder, clasping her neck. "Why, of course not, my own darling. Oh, what a baby it is! You're quite a bit of a girl still."

"But if I did turn all that was bad, and never came near dear old Auntie, you'd love me all the same? I know you would."

"Why of course I should, my pet," sobbed the old woman; and she began to rock her to and fro, as if expecting her to cry herself to sleep. "There, I've done. It's all right, Baby; we'll go to the race, and I hope he'll win after all."

"Ah!" cried Lucy joyfully. "And of course! Why the very thing!"

"What's of course, and the very thing?"

"Sandiwell Bay, Auntie."

"What about it?"

"There's a nice hotel there, and a pier and band, and it's only four miles from the race, and we'll drive over on the day, and we'll stop a week at the seaside."

"Lor', what a clever one you are, Baby; and how you do get over me! We will. I do reg'lar long for a sniff of the briny, as they say. But Sandiwell—is it a good place for s'rimps?"

"Sure to be, dear. But we should have to go to-day."

"To-day? Who's to pack up and go to-day?"

"I'll pack up, Auntie, and you shan't have a bit of trouble."

"But I ain't anything fit to go in, my dear."

"Stuff and nonsense, Auntie! You have heaps of things. There, don't you worry yourself about clothes. I'll see that our boxes are ready; and, Auntie, dear, I will be so good. I know it's all over now," she whispered, with a curious pinched look about her lips. "I shall never go back to him, because—because I can feel that he never really loved me as I did him."

"Never, my pet."

"But I can't help it, Auntie; it's life to me to try and hear about him, and no matter what he does, I want to see him sometimes."

"Ah, yes," said the old woman; "and as soon as he holds up his finger and beckons like, or chucks his hankychy like the sultan in the burlesque——"

"No, Auntie, no," said Lucy sadly; "it's all over; all past and gone."

"And you'll be sensible and wise?"

"Yes, Auntie; as wise as such a poor, weak, silly girl can be."

"And marry Mr. Daines?"

Poor Lucy Lee! She turned her pretty, piquante face with a wistful light in the eyes, a smile that was full of sadness on her lip, and a look that, in spite of her past, was pure womanly in its love and faith in the great mistake of her little life.

"No, Auntie dear," she said softly, "never—never. I like Mr. Daines, and, poor fellow, I know he loves me very dearly, but it's all killed, dear—it's quite dead. I shall never love anyone again—only you."

"Lucy, my precious," cried the old woman, beginning to sob, as she drew the frail little figure to her breast; "but I'm nearly done for now, and it will soon be me who is quite dead. What then?"

"What then, Auntie?" said Lucy, with a strange dreamy look in her eyes. "Do you remember coming down to the farm, to where there was a little girl in black, sitting crying on a stool, all alone and desolate in the empty home?"

"Remember it, my precious? Oh, so well—so well."

"And you took her in your lap, and put your dear, soft motherly arms round her."

"No, no, my darling, not motherly," sobbed Aunt Duncan; "I never had a bairn."

"Yes, dear, soft, motherly arms around me, and kissed me and told me not to fret—not to cry any more, for I was not left quite desolate, because you had come to fetch me, to take me to a happier home, where you would try to be a new mother to the poor miserable little orphan girl. You said you were a poor, fat, red-faced, ugly old woman."

"Did I say so, dear, did I?"

"Yes, Auntie. I remember every word."

"Well, my pet, it was quite true."

"But you didn't tell me you had a heart of gold—so full of love and tenderness for me that I have often wondered that I could ever go away from you as I did."

"That was only natur', my dear; you weren't to blame for that, though I will say it did seem 'ard."

"Yes, Auntie, but I did not know it then, for I was mad about him."

"Ah yes, my dear, and we all go mad like that, whether we're queens and duchesses, or only poor people who keep a shop."

"Yes, Aunt dear, I suppose so; and it isn't our fault."

"But I did try to be a mother to you, my dear, even if I have said 'ard words now and then."

"It did not take any trying, Auntie: you said you'd come to take me to a happier place, and when the time comes that you are going away, keep fast hold of my hand, dear, and let's go together, for I've no one else to live for now."

(To be continued.)

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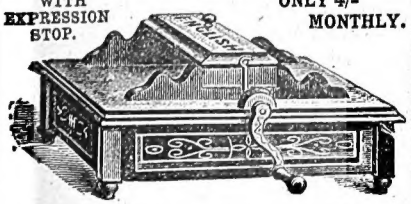

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